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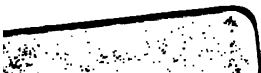




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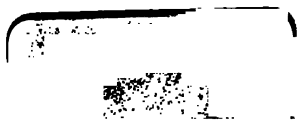




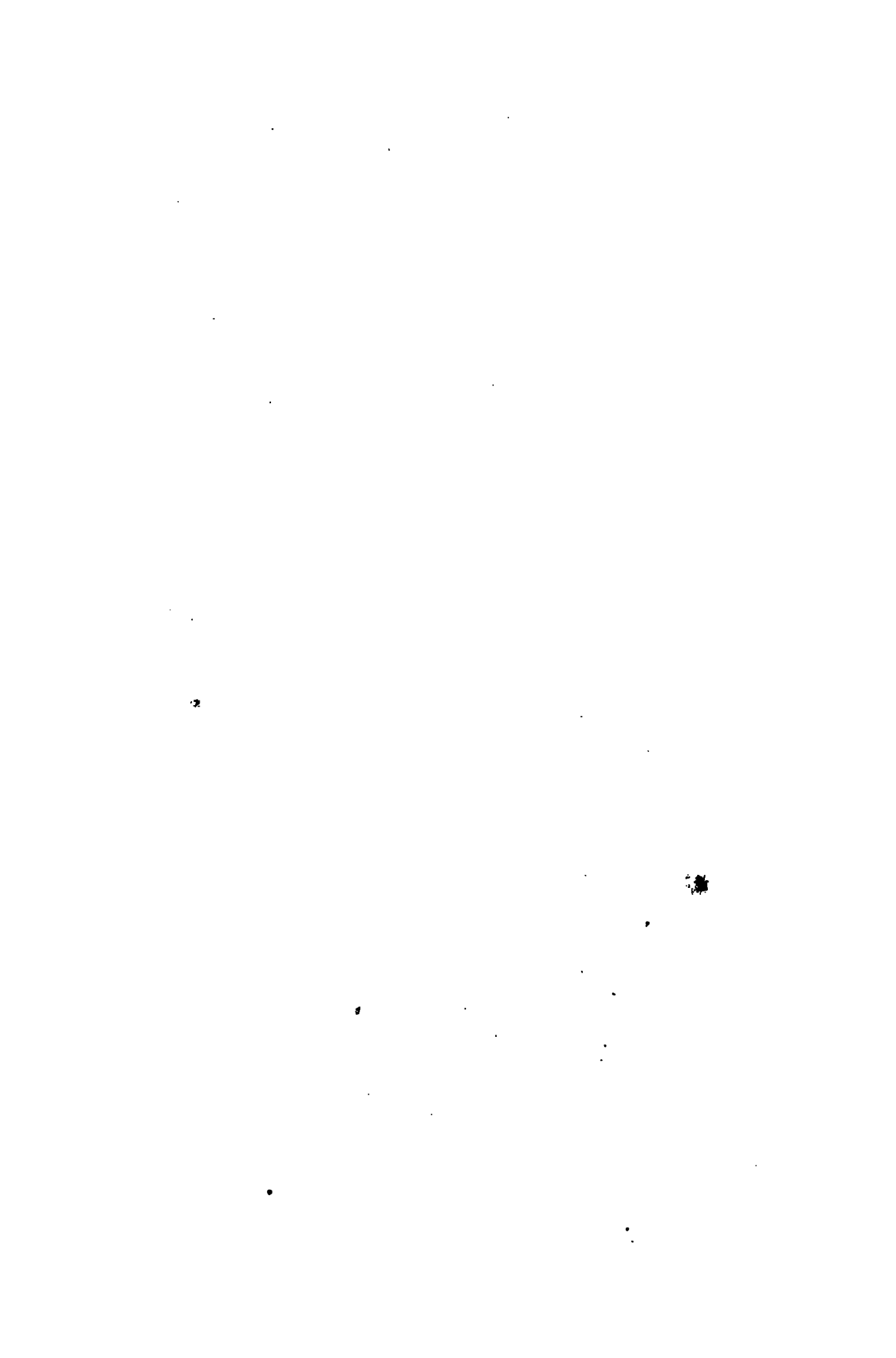
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EIGHT

J.H. 1828.

SERMONS

ON

“THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES,”

RECENTLY

PREACHED AT MARGARET'S CHAPEL

IN THE CITY OF BATH.

BY THE

REV. HARVEY MARRIOTT,

RECTOR OF CLAVERTON, AND CHAPLAIN TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
LORD KENTON.

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IT is not with the rash attempt to explain unfulfilled prophecy, nor with the desire of scrutinizing presumptuously into the hidden ways of God, that the Author ventures to submit the following Sermons to the public eye. He would strongly endeavour, in the transactions of public, as well as in the most minute circumstances of private life, so far only to trace "the finger of God," as shall make these events, what they seem always intended to be, illustrative of spiritual good. In the wonders of providential guidance, whether manifested in the Word, in the Works, or in the Ways of God, he would gladly have his own mind led to see God's love manifested throughout, in tender mercy warning, or in parental love inviting, all to seek after and to

accept "the unsearchable riches of Christ." He would wish, should it so please God to bless such instrumentality, to call the attention of those into whose hands these Sermons may happen to fall, to the solemn consideration of these peculiarly eventful times ; and that each may strive, through the sanctifying influence of the Spirit of eternal truth, to become a practical illustration, in heart and manner of life, of the true believer's most ardent and daily prayer of "Thy Kingdom come:" that each may thus glorify the Saviour in being more and more conformed to his image, and so made "meet for the inheritance of his Saints in light,"—here in the rich enjoyment of present peace, and hereafter in the full fruition of purchased glory.

SERMON I.

"THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES."

ST. MATTHEW xvi. 2, 3.

He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, it will be fair weather : for the sky is red. And in the morning, it will be foul weather to-day : for the sky is red, and lowering. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky ; but can ye not discern the signs of the times ?

IT was the Saviour's rebuke to the Pharisees and Sadducees, (men, for the most part, shrewd, watchful, and learned in earthly things,) that they were regardless of those signs of their times, which called them powerfully to the consideration of heavenly things. Not to watch, therefore, for such ways of speaking to the understanding and to the hearts of mankind, as Almighty God, in his providence, uses and appoints, from external marks thereof, is a sinful omission of an enjoined duty. It is a duty

forcibly pressed upon all of us in God's Word. The Lord Jesus Christ, in another part of his Gospel, most strongly puts it before us thus: "Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is:—And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch." (St. Mark xiii. 33, 37.) This command for *general* watchfulness is not more plainly enjoined in sacred Scripture, than apparent as a duty from the acknowledged shortness of human life, and the manifest, because the experienced, uncertainty of every thing human. But the passage in the text has more immediate relation to the Christian duty of deducing spiritual good from whatever seems to mark a *peculiar* dispensation from local or from contemporaneous events, designated, in Scripture language, "signs of the times."

It can scarcely be matter unknown to the congregation which I now address, that this subject has, of late years, been more and more dwelt upon; that it has been issuing from the press for public perusal, as well as preached from the pulpit for congregational attention and deeper thoughtfulness. My brethren, I would not withhold, in this place, the consideration of a subject, so generally discussed, from

something of discussion here. If Christ hath shown us that periods exist when the divine counsels are made more manifest to the world, and that, in those periods, unless we consider the "signs of the times," we are guilty of sin; and when so many Christians, wise and good, in various parts of Christendom, are deeming themselves not presumptuous in proclaiming those "signs" now, I could not but feel myself sufficiently called upon to speak upon these things here; and it is my earnest wish and prayer so to speak of them, that I may not justly incur censure, either from the careless and sinful livers of this world, that I needlessly alarmed their fears; or from the really awakened servants of Christ, that I unwarrantably excited their hopes.

We are now again arrived at the season of Advent. This sacred day, the first of that hallowed period, once more calls upon us to consider signs of the Redeemer's advent past, prophetic assurances of his second advent yet to come: to consider, in all its solemn consequences, **WHO** came once, and **why** he came; to remember **who** will come again, and for **what** he will come. Matter full of the deepest interest is again brought collectedly before us,

that we may acknowledge, in saving faith, the Redeemer's first advent, that so we may be ready to receive him, with shouts of praise and thanksgiving, at his awful second advent. The duty, therefore, of considering "the signs of the times," all of which point and are designed to lead us to Christ, will furnish, I trust, matter of profitable thought for spiritual application of what this holy season brings more especially before us. It is a subject, which, I am quite aware, needs the utmost circumspection in the handling of it; and as a preliminary caution against what may be an erroneous inference from the consideration of it at all, I would venture to express my own opinion that it seems safer to regard "the signs," if we think we live among them, than to say much, precisely, upon what we may suppose to be *the thing signified*. "The finger of God" may be, and oftentimes is, seen, when his ultimate counsels are entirely hidden, as to the particular issue of passing events, whether in public or in private life; and if, therefore, we would be really guided by the "wisdom which cometh from above," we shall be slower in the interpretation of what *is*, in the expectation of what *may be*, than active and

conscientious in the personal application of it to ourselves.

It seems also apparent in the history of the past, that it would not be well for us to be too minute in applying what may really be "signs of the times," to something still future, and not perfectly made out to be the thing signified.

In his first Epistle to the Thessalonians, St. Paul had used these words: "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive, and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep: For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trumpet of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (C. iv. 15—17.) "Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober." (C. v. 6.)

When these words were read by the Thessalonians, it was not to be wondered at that they deduced the immediate expectation from them, that Christ was upon the point of coming in his second advent to the Judgment. But

they were deceived herein; and the holy Apostle, in a second Epistle, put them right: "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the "coming"—or as it is supposed better translated, "as to the coming"—"of our Lord "Jesus Christ, and (by) our gathering together "unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in "mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor "by word, nor by letter, as from us, as that "the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man "deceive you by any means: for that day shall "not come, except there come a falling away "first, and that man of sin be revealed, the "son of perdition." (C. ii. 1—3.)

It was also the strong and general expectation, in a later period of the Church of Christ, that the end of all things was at hand. Towards the close of the eleventh century the minds of men were so much acted upon by this feeling, that the nearest and dearest ties of life were broken and forgotten, amid the general ferment which excited thousands to join the Crusades for the rescue of Christ's sepulchre from infidels, and so manifest, what in those days was deemed, a holy waiting and preparation for the immediate coming of their Lord.

It is possible, then, for sincere believers to

let love, or fear, or ardent hope, so influence their minds, as to cause them to transgress the bounds which mark a line betwixt Almighty God's intention, and man's over-hasty construction; and it is under the full force of this reflection, that I venture upon the consideration of a subject, which I think we are called upon to consider, and to put such thoughts before you as shall be suggested to myself upon matter momentous in its application to us all. It is always an awful portion of a Minister's duty to watch for himself, and to watch for others too; not the substitute for his hearers' watchfulness for themselves; but to rouse them to this great and essential Christian duty, at the peril of his own soul. The Minister's commission is—"O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel" (Ezek. xxxiii. 7); the people's warning is—"Can ye not discern the signs of the times?"

It is not, my brethren, that we absolutely need other "signs of the times," than those of all times in which mankind have lived, to put before us the awful consequences appended to the present state of our being in reference to an eternity to come. But, in private, as in public life, if Almighty God plainly shows

something, for the consideration of his creatures, awful in its character, altogether unforeseen and unlikely to transpire from previously existing circumstances, and big with consequences resulting or probable, which all would feel interested in contemplating if *known* to be at hand, we certainly are summoned to more than usual watchfulness for the divine will, in its immediate influence upon our souls: our attitude then most especially becomes that of—"Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." (1 Sam. iii. 9.)

That the present times offer those considerations as an intended lesson of spiritual usefulness, I feel myself quite called upon to assert; and I also feel that it is not a difficult assertion to make good. But, in putting before you what appear to myself manifest "signs of the times" to this end, I again repeat the caution I have already given, that we shall do better to avoid all matter merely speculative, and with humble and teachable hearts to seek of God that lesson only which it is intended we should learn. All other ways of regarding God's dealings are dangerous and presumptuous, and oftentimes lead to evil, and injure the cause of our most holy faith.

With this view of our own times before us, I cannot question that there are "signs of the times," which God shows for purposes of spiritual good; that we may "be ready" against whatever shall occur, amid all the uncertainty of human life, in the less extended interests of individuals, as well as in the destinies of nations.

If we regard the events which have passed over the heads of those among us who have lived during the last thirty or five and thirty years, we cannot but perceive in them much which characterizes them as peculiar. I would not say, in the events of national incident, that other ages have not also exhibited some of the features of eventful circumstance which have marked our own. But I shall not be judged rashly to speak, when I say that I am quite sure that no period, since the world began, can present in the page of history such a combination of events generally, and such events at all in some instances, as have transpired in quick succession over us during the period named, and which, in many of their manifest characters, are still passing before our eyes. They are some of them of a character so evidently marked as "signs of the times," that (however

I might and do shrink from the very positive interpretation put upon them, as preludes, by some warm-hearted Christians of the present day) I hold their ardent zeal herein, though it carry them, for the present at least, somewhat too far, much less injurious to themselves or others, than its opposite,—that cold, careless state of mind, which regards all events with equal indifference, whether it be the thunder of power, the alarm of terror, or the still small voice of persuasion, that calls man to consider his soul.

There appear six different features which in themselves, individually and collectively, give us abundant warning that they are “signs of the times;” and that, therefore, we are called upon, in solemn inference from our blessed Lord’s words in the text, to “discern” and consider them. I will name them now in order. But as the matter which they will necessarily bring before us, even in a very general contemplation of them, would lead me much beyond a single address from this place, I shall treat of them successively, on other occasions, as God shall permit you to hear and me to speak. And this I shall endeavour to do, not to gratify in myself, or to excite in you,

a vain and idle curiosity, but that I may be blest, through such instrumentality, in awakening both in you and in myself more serious thoughts and expectations of the certain future; more regard to our own souls; more earnest watchfulness for the present use and final accomplishment of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; and more anxious single-eyed dependence upon him under the awful assurance of his Word, that in our relationship to time and to eternity, we “know not what a day may bring forth.”

These six, which I would venture to put before you, are as follow :

1st. The great, sudden, and unusual change in the kingdoms and nations of a large portion of the habitable world at and since the period of that tremendous concussion in civilized Europe, which ended in the overthrow of the monarchy of France.

That events of this character are intended to be ever looked upon as important, is seen in the imagery under which they are spoken of in the Word of God: “The stars of Heaven, and the “constellations thereof, shall not give their “light: the sun shall be darkened in his going “forth, and the moon shall not cause her light

“to shine.” (Isaiah xiii. 10.) While the Prophets of God speak thus of the downfall and changes of human empire, when such dispensations are before us, we are surely called upon to regard them as “signs of the times.”

2dly. The general abhorrence felt and openly avowed, and in a large portion of Europe acted upon, in regard to what was once the open practice, and ever will be the eternal disgrace, of Christian countries, in their public marketing for human slaves.

Though the rejection of the Slave Trade might be ranked by political economists as no other than the sign of an improving civilization and due order in social habits, as a congregation professing to believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we are bound to consider any great result, which Christian principle is the sole cause of eliciting from the world, as among “the signs of the times:” and as such it may be scripturally wise to mark the general abhorrence which our own times have felt, and very powerfully expressed, of the accursed traffic in the African Slave Trade.

3dly. The undoubted change which has taken place in the once unqualified recognition of Papistical errors, and the apparently impending

decrease of the false pretensions of Saracenic superstition, and Mahomedan imposture.

4thly. A manifestly awakened interest in the Christian world to the great and peculiar doctrines of the Gospel; and a visible and an acknowledged dying away of that listlessness and indifference to their spiritual post, which for so long a period marked and disgraced the Christian ministry.

5thly. The interest felt, and through a considerable portion of the Christian world evidenced by outward deed, for the forlorn and affecting condition of the state of the Jews; a people once greatly beloved, but now, and for many centuries past, cast off and forsaken, until the Divine Word shall speak, "It is enough."

And, *lastly*, that prodigious increase of knowledge, among all ranks of people, a general desire most especially directed towards the study and acquisition of religious knowledge: the press teeming with religious publications; the people eager in the purchase thereof; and the wide circulation of the sacred Word of God over so large a portion of the earth.

More than the bare enumeration of these

six different subjects for our future consideration, in due remembrance of the uncertainty of every thing future, our time will not now permit me to bring before you. In their separate and individual character they appear to my own mind greatly momentous; and, therefore, that in their combined character they should be considered as intended to be influential. That they are "signs of the times," for myself I entirely believe. But of *what* they are the especial sign, beyond the evident call to spiritual thought and watchfulness for our souls, I do not, for one moment, venture to affirm. That they signify something, is quite evident. These are matters too big for human agency alone, and far beyond all human calculation. Had any of us, my brethren, who lived at their commencement, some five and thirty years ago, been told of what we have lived to witness, we should indeed have regarded the matter as the speculation of a visionary, or as the sinister aim of an impostor.

Inasmuch, however, as we have experienced a succession of events around us in other lands, and among ourselves at home, which no period of the world, in its history of a six thousand years duration, has ever witnessed; I feel that

it is an especial duty, on my part, to bring your thoughts to this particular view of them, now so much spoken of in the Christian world every where. And while this I endeavour to do, let me urge upon you again and again the only justifiable object of your considering them at all: namely, that you may regard the ways of Providence as the visible interpretation, in its measure, of his written word: that whether I put before you, as your Minister, matter of public or of private incident, it can have but one intended end; that the soul may be moved to deeper consideration of those interests which involve it in the events of time, as introductory to their consummation in eternity. For a few short years you are stationed in this place of your moral probation. During that little interval which passes between your first introduction into existence and your unchangeable condition fixed for eternity, you have God with you working for your good. In his sacred Word, he reveals his will, and shows you, what otherwise you would have never known, save only in its unqualified and bitter fruits, the origin of our evil, and its only cure; the corruption of our soul, and its redemption in the free mercy of Jesus Christ, our great, our only,

our sufficient propitiation. In his book of nature he shows you his power, his wisdom, and his goodness; and surrounds you with the infinite wonders of his power and wisdom, that he may draw you to the contemplation of his unbounded love. In the revolutions of empires, and the changes wrought among nations and individuals, he bids you see that "it is the finger of God;" and puts "the signs of the times" before you, with the paternal manifestation of his tender mercy; and of all his dealings ever repeats to us his recorded testimony, "O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end." (Deut. xxxii. 29.) You, my brethren, who, through grace have been led to consider it, in reference to your great salvation in Christ Jesus, continue thus to "commit your souls unto him as unto a faithful" Redeemer. "You are compleat in him:" but remember, in him alone.

You, my brethren, who have not considered your latter end, certainly do not consider the ways of God, whether he speak through his Word, or through "the signs of the times." To you, nevertheless, God still in forbearing mercy speaks through both. They are calls

urged upon you with a holy calling every where. A merciful Saviour still invites, "Come unto me." Heretofore you have made your excuse—your farm, your merchandize, your business, your pleasures; and your time is fast hastening to its final close. "The night is far spent; the day is at hand." The hour will soon be here which terminates the assigned period of your few days upon earth; and then are you called no more, save only by the awakening blast of the Archangel's trumpet from your dust to the Judgment. Scripture now tells you that you are among those of whom Christ, in tender mercy and fulness of redemption, declared, "Many are called:" take heed lest, "through an evil heart of unbelief," you be not among those of whom Christ, for your warning, also declared, "few are chosen." Choose but Christ now, and Christ will not reject you then.

SERMON II.

“THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES.”

ISAIAH xxvi. 9.

*For when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of
the world will learn righteousness.*

THE Prophet warns us of the Christian duty of watchfulness, as especially pressed upon us when God speaks audibly in the display of his superintending power; and the memorial of a second Advent Sunday points to the great end of all our watchfulness,—the Redeemer’s advent in the flesh, and the Redeemer’s advent to the general judgment. Whatever, then, brings our minds to this great end of our being—Christian watchfulness in the cause of the kingdom of our God and his Christ—will be well adapted to the purposes of this

hallowed season : whatever leads us to the consideration of Christ's advent, the mercies of his first advent past, and the glories and the terrors of his second advent yet to come, whether that be nigh or far off, may well serve as invitation to think more of Christ as our redeeming Saviour, our omniscient Judge.

In my last morning's discourse from this place upon those eventful movements of our day which have led many Christians to believe them "signs of the times," I introduced the subject as one which appeared to call for our serious consideration also. I declared, at the same time, that it was not the idle and unprofitable motive of curiously prying into the secret counsels of the great God who rules over heaven and earth, which should be the motive for such consideration ; and that it would be more profitable to note the signs, in reference to their intended practical and spiritual effect upon our own souls individually, than to think or say much as to the thing signified, and still future. To this end I ventured to draw your attention, in unison with that of our fellow Christians who are thinking and speaking much of these things in other

places, to six great and eventful circumstances, as peculiarly marking the history of our own times, and which might, without presuming too nicely to apply them to any specific thing future, be profitably considered by us as "signs of the times," and therefore, according to our blessed Lord's words, calling for our peculiar observation, "Ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?"

Of these six, the first of those which I ventured to enumerate is now to be considered; and this was—The great, sudden, and unusual change in the kingdoms and nations of a large portion of the habitable world at and since the period of that tremendous concussion in civilized Europe, which ended in the overthrow of the monarchy of France.

When I named this as the first sign, I also showed, from the prophet Isaiah, that Scripture appends great importance, as a moral engine, to the downfall of empires, in the strong imagery used in the prediction thereof: "The stars of heaven, and the constellations thereof, shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon

“shall not cause her light to shine.” (Isaiah xiii. 10.)

With such figurative description in the Word of God, and with such moral consequence as is attached to the rise and fall of empires in various other passages of Holy Writ, we are impressively called upon to regard these great events; to regard them as in themselves important, and in their consequences as intended by Almighty God to read an awful lesson to mankind.

It is now somewhat more than five and thirty years since the great epoch in the history of Europe occurred in the revolution which overturned the kingdom of France. Were this epoch to be considered without its peculiar accompaniments and eventful consequences, it would be no more than other issues, which the page of history records, to the successful resistance to a human dynasty, and terminating in scenes of massacre and blood. Every such period is big with awful warning. Nineveh, Babylon, Jerusalem in her twofold ruin, Carthage the totally destroyed, Rome pagan, and modern France, each held out in their mere fall a warning voice to the world. But not one of them was attended or followed by cir-

cumstances, such as characterized the eventful overthrow of the French monarchy; and none, therefore, are considered, as affecting these times, or the times which immediately succeeded their own, under any thing like a comparison with the results of this later revolution.

Its causes, too, were not a sudden bursting forth of popular fury, or the circumscribed plot of an ambitious few, thirsting for power or discontented with submission. Whatever the proximate cause may have been for kindling the blaze, the principle had been engendering for a long time past.

It seems to have been the ebullition of sentiment and principle, which the abettors thereof had long been brooding over in secret, and which, under an acknowledged avowal of them, were levelled not merely at an existing government, but against all government, and against every principle, human or divine, which holds society together. In no former revolution among mankind had so many circumstances combined as in this, to make it quite plain, as a sign of those times, to be felt and profited by in after times.

It was peculiarly marked. In the downfall

of other empires there never were such circumstances accompanying it as in this. Other nations have fallen amid surrounding or indwelling real ignorance, in times of intellectual darkness in regard to the revealed knowledge of God ; they have perished amid the wreck of their own idols, and the temple of some demigod, and the throne of their earthly potentate, have alike crumbled into a common ruin ; or they have sunk amid proffered light to lighten their darkness, and the extinction of its latest glimmer synchronized with the people's fall. But when France became a wonder to the nations of the earth, in the vast concussion under which her ancient monarchy was hurled to the ground, and her tens of thousands lay deluged with their own blood, it was in times of light and knowledge ; it was a people confessing, amid many errors, great and true things in religion, philosophy, and science ; a people surrounded by cotemporary knowledge among the other nations of Europe ; and living in the meridian of intellectual and moral light.

But that which marked with peculiar character the fall of France, as connected in its consequences with our own day, and therefore

as a "sign of" these "times," was the tone of feeling which seemed to pervade that whole people, save those who fled from it into other lands, of a deep and unshaken disbelief of all religion. When the Word of God expressly declares, that it is only "the fool that saith in "his heart, There is no God," we seem lost in the living record, as recorded in our own experience of such a day, that a whole nation have passed their legislative enactment that "there is no God:" that it should have been a common feeling among them that the principle of human life is but to subserve purposes of animal enjoyment, and intellectual evanescent pleasures; and that when these are ended, what follows is nothing but "an eternal "sleep."

Never since the world began, under similar condition, was such avowal made. And yet was their mind seeking still for something directing and influential; something to be enthroned in the place of Deity; something to be the object of the common assent of man that there is above man what man is not: they needed a god, and an altar whereon to enshrine their own idol, and they set up the Temple of the Goddess of Reason: that which separates

man from brute, but which they had debased, they made an argument against their professed belief; and deifying reason, ignorantly acknowledged that the general feeling that some God there must be, is true.

This public renunciation of revealed religion was the more extraordinary as a "sign of the times," inasmuch as it was made by a people all professing Christianity. That individuals in early periods of the history of the Christian faith should recant and forsake their creed, is a fact upholden in the temporary falling away of believers seeking for themselves the crown of martyrdom, and not waiting for God to give it; it is manifested in the denial of the faith in an apostate Julian, and evidenced in many a Demas loving this present world. But for a whole nation, calling itself Christian, and living in Christian times, and surrounded by Christian countries, at once and collectively to shake off all acknowledgment of revealed truth, is the most convincing argument that it was an awakening sign to the whole earth, that a strange anomaly had happened, and that it should call forth the anxious and trembling observation of the Christian world.

It would little serve the purpose I have before me to follow up the immediate consequences of all this to the infatuated people themselves: to tell of those scenes of blood which followed up the murder of their king; the divided interests which separated the nearest ties of human nature, brother against brother levelling the accusation which brought him to the scaffold, or drawing the sword himself, and steeping it in his brother's blood; the harrowing deeds of man against man, better characterized as deeds of hellish fiends divided against each other; the cruel sufferings which many of the leaders herein afterward underwent, so agonizing to the body, under the still more agonizing condition of the soul, as to render them, fierce and bloody and murderous as they had themselves been, objects of the most touching pity and compassion. All these and similar results amid the confusion which invaded the order of their whole procedures, are not the immediate object I have in view, in drawing your attention to the picture of revolutionary France as the first of those "signs of the times" which we are, as I would argue, called upon to contemplate. It was the primary movement only in the great and mighty events which God was

sending, or overruling, for purposes of his moral government.

Were it not for the consequences, of which this mighty overthrow and wild chaos amid mind and matter were but the prelude, and from which they flowed as from their more immediate cause, there would not be a stronger call upon Christians to consider the revolution of modern France, than to contemplate the ruins of ancient Babylon or Palmyra. The ruin of an empire always speaks a lesson to mankind; but it is only when accompanied, as was the ruin of modern France, with consequences such as have been its manifest result, that we are justified in deeming it more than an ordinary sign, and fully characteristic as among "the signs of the times."

See, my brethren, how significantly these consequences now speak to us. If any thing were wanting to confirm the argument laid down in Scripture, and established in the experience of mankind, of the necessity of civil government, it was afforded in the manifestation of what followed from a whole people's first questioning, and then throwing off, the obligations of obedience to "the Powers that be." It was the wide spread of the principles which

denied the necessity of civil ties and religious sanctions; and which were at first too much countenanced by many of our own community, who first looked upon them in their tinsel glitter, apart from their real falsehood and pernicious tendency; it was the introduction of these into other lands, and especially into our own land, which led to their being examined thoroughly, and opposed effectually. The theory of no government, no civil authority betwixt man and man, caused such an examination of the strange hypothesis, as brought numbers at last to the conclusion which an inspired Apostle had already laid down for us in the Word of God: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation." (Rom. xiii. 1, 2.) And when it was told us that religion is mere priestcraft, that there is no God to punish, no revelation to guide, and that to die is but to sleep eternally, the wise and the good were more than ever moved "earnestly to contend for the faith which was once de-

“livered to the Saints;” every exertion was made by the friends of religion and civil order : the Gospel was put forth in its popular evidences, and, like gold tried in the furnace, was found to be that precious metal still. Hence the truths of the Gospel became better understood; and much inquiry, at first from necessity induced, paved the way for the introduction of those pure and evangelical doctrines so long hidden from the people, and disguised under the form of a dry system of ethnic philosophy; and which were to give their character also, in a few more years, to another manifest sign among the “signs of the times.” For while the corrupting leaven was diffusing itself; while the insinuations of the Prussian Frederic, falsely named the Great, were combined with the wit of the French Voltaire and his infernal associates, to poison the character of mankind with the venom of infidel and immoral principles; when society seemed infected with them, and our own country in particular to tremble under the progress which they were making among us, it pleased God to stem the torrent threatening to overwhelm us. Piety and talent were called forth into diligent exercise; and, though the infecting taint long remained, per-

haps still remains among us, the pen, the energy, and the prayers of true believers so met the objections and malice urged against the religion of the Gospel, that, by God's good blessing, it became better understood among us, more valued, and more diligently studied in its best and purest character.

And now, my brethren, I would urge upon your deepest consideration the necessity of our applying, individually, the spiritual lesson intended by this sign of our times. Little does it signify to us, in reference to our own souls profiting thereby, what this sign, in conjunction with other signs, may import. Our business is with the present moment, and the lesson here is what the prophet Daniel has expressed for us in the Word of eternal truth: "Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his. And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding. He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him." (C. ii. 20—22.) Every sign of our times is intended to bring the soul to these

conclusions in reference to the sovereign will, the providence, and the grace of God. As taught in his word, we are called upon to recognise his ways among the children of men. And how better can we recognise them, in the awful event of our day which we many of us witnessed, and the consequences whereof have all experienced, than in renouncing the principle which involved the ruin? It was human reason, setting itself up in the place of God, and contending against God, which brought temporal desolation and spiritual confusion upon many nations of the earth; and we are warned herein how we magnify reason, or oppose reason to the truths of revelation. As a Minister of Christ's religion, I call not upon you to renounce your reason, but to apply it to its only proper uses. It is not to bring revelation to its own level, but to submit to what revelation teaches. Yes, my brethren, if you would derive spiritual good, and not be made amenable for spiritual neglect, in the great sign of our times this day put forth as the first among those for discerning whereof we are each responsible, you must let reason bow before the cross of Christ, and there receive the offer of redeeming love, which reason may be taught to

appreciate, but which even Angels cannot fully comprehend. Whether Christ be coming in millennial glory to commence that reign of his thousand years, as some interpret, in person here on earth; or whether Christ be coming to take unto himself his great power, and summon the dead from their sleep, and the quick into the air, each changed for purposes of the final Judgment, as others hold; or whether neither of these expected issues be yet at hand; we leave to Him in whose sovereign fiat rest as well the interests of a single individual, as the destinies of the universe. But inasmuch as Christ is already come in that only way in which we are absolutely required to believe of his actual presence, we must "discern" him with the eye of faith, amid "the signs of the times," calling us to accept our full and only salvation in him. This, my brethren, is our sufficient call, our own individual concern. Though you see him not in the thunder of his power, yet you may hear him speaking to your soul in "the still small voice." To him as a Saviour, many in these days, and among all ranks of people, are more and more looking; looking, too, with faith beyond the mere utterance of "I believe in Jesus Christ;" many are

brought to acknowledge him, boldly and faithfully to acknowledge him, their once incarnate Saviour, their now glorified and only deliverer from the bondage and the condemnation of sin. You who do not yet acknowledge him thus, beware how you listen not to him that speaketh unto you from heaven. His signs are in the world; and whatever they precede as their grand and final issue, this they undoubtedly intend, that you also should awake, and call upon your God. He, the Saviour of mankind, calls you to acknowledge him as a Saviour God for you. Abase the pride of reason, and bow down at the foot of his cross: mortify the desires of the worldly, unrenewed heart, and follow Christ: renounce that world which you have solemnly promised to renounce, and give up your souls unto him who hath bought them with his blood. Call upon him now, while time remains, and grace may be imparted to enable you to call upon him at all; and join the general chorus of his redeemed, who, in blissful experience in the realms of light, or in gifted faith among the saints that are yet on earth, sing the heartfelt song of "Worthy is the Lamb." So learn wisdom from the "signs of the times;" and in the manifestation

of the signs, and in your own spiritual profiting thereby, you shall be enabled from your inmost soul to know and believe that "this is the finger of God." Your share in the mercy of the dispensation shall then be manifested to your own rich enjoyment; and when Christ shall come to you by death or by judgment, you shall see him as he is, and be made, amid the thousand times ten thousand which surround his throne, a glorified partaker of his redeeming love.

SERMON III.

"THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES."

HEBREWS xiii. 3.

Remember them that are in bonds.

A Third Advent Sunday again calls upon us to remember Christ; Christ come in the flesh, Christ hereafter to come to the Judgment. How can we better remember him than in the application of his own words: "What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch?" Watch for every passing incident which shall administer matter and opportunity for closer knowledge, closer imitation, of Christ; closer walking in the communion of Christ. And remembering Christ, we are called upon to remember our brethren: Christ bids us do so; and his sacred word adds the consideration of human suffering as the constraining call for

this our Christian remembrance : “ Remember
“ them that are in bonds.”

This short admonition from the holy Apostle of us gentiles, abounding in all the warm glow of an animated Christian love, will be a fit introduction to our consideration of the second among “ the signs of the times”—the general abhorrence felt and openly avowed, and in a large portion of Europe acted upon, in regard to what was once the open practice, and ever will be the eternal disgrace, of Christian countries, in their public Marketing for Human Slaves.

In considering this subject, from this place, I feel that I tread upon tender ground ; but that, much more from the surmises which the bare naming of such a subject may elicit from my hearers as to what I may advance hereafter, than from any conviction upon my own mind that the view I mean to take of it ought to give offence, though censure, I fear, I must be prepared to incur. The very mention of a subject of this magnitude, and near relationship to the strongest feelings of many; before it be known how and for what purposes it will be introduced, would necessarily excite suspicion as to its being named at all : and in this, our

native country, which once stood foremost with all her maritime and mercantile sanction given to the thing, and with no legislative preventive set against it, the only *recent* change of sentiment among us will not justify the hope that it is yet changed to all.

Why then do I bring it before you? Not, my brethren, with any other object than as linking it among those signs of our times, which call upon all of us to consider: not as a mere political question, at once nullifying private rights and long acknowledged possessions: not as a source of personal condemnation: not with the view of investigating the whole subject, in any of its bearings, one jot further than shall give it its character as a "sign of the times," in reference to its moral influence, and therefore pregnant with spiritual usefulness. But while I thus deprecate the wish needlessly and unjustly to wound the feelings of individuals upon a subject for which, in its first beginning, they are not responsible; I would not have one single voice that can be raised among us silent, upon what this detested traffic is, in itself, in the sight of God and man. That an Asiatic despot, in heathen darkness, should trample on his fellow-creatures' necks, and call them

slaves ; that Spartan monsters, magnified in the nonsense of a classical enthusiasm into wise legislators, should make human slaves commit filthy sin as a beacon to their own children ; that English barons, in times little better than pagan darkness, with all their feudal privileges around them, should proudly lord it over their degraded villains ; that an American savage should scalp his slave ; an African monster torment his slave ; and a South-Sea cannibal feed upon him ;—nothing of this surprises, however it may touch and humble, the soul of thinking man. But that in Christian times, and in Christian countries, centuries should have rolled on with human slavery under Christian masters unchecked and gloried in, is one of those wonderful anomalies in the history of our race, which must wait for its adjustment before Him who is not deceived. But our business is more with the present, than with the past herein ; and happily there is an opening germ of better things. A dreadful load of responsibility rests primarily upon the first promoters of the accursed traffic ; and let those who are not thus amenable, but still oppose its final abolition, consider what portion of responsibility also rests upon them. But the public

feeling is changed. And that this great and very general change in the sentiments of so large a portion of mankind must be regarded as a "sign of the times," seems to be as clearly the intention of the great and eternal God, who over-rules the destinies of the nations of the earth, as that any other important event which greatly affects us, in our public or in our private relationships, should be recognised as his providence. If we lived not in times which witnessed not, as these times witness, other signs combined with this sign, and stamping an impress upon their character which makes even the inconsiderate to consider; so great a transition as the legislative abolition of a universal practice among nations in itself really is, would not be an unmarked incident of our day. In proportion to the magnitude of an event, in itself or in its consequences, we are for ever taught to regard its practical lesson; and when God works a work which gives a different current to human feeling, and to much of human circumstance, it is the voice of him who speaketh from above, and tells his creatures of the significant call of that Almighty One, "in whose hand is "the soul of every living thing, and the breath "of all mankind." (Job xii. 10.) All final

causes of events working for good, are resolvable simply into the power, and will, and goodness of Him, of whom in Scripture it is declared, "The Lord killeth and maketh alive; he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up: the Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich; he bringeth low and lifteth up" (1 Sam. ii. 6, 7); without whom "not a sparrow falleth to the ground," and "by whom the hairs of our head are all numbered." Taking then this only safe way of considering the matter before us, as one among other characteristics of our day, and consequently calling, among other "signs of the times," for Christian vigilance and circumspection; I shall proceed to the discussion of a subject which, under any other than a religious view of it, would neither be well for me to deliver, nor for you to hear, from this place.

The question before us, as a practical subject, affects us all. At this moment we all possess much of what we do possess of daily comforts and worldly advantages, in the undoubted fact of their being the proceeds of human labour among a slave population not yet emancipated. Some of us must trace up our all of earthly possessions to that source; some a manifest

portion; and every one, under modified circumstances as to more or less, much of daily earthly advantages attending our condition in the world. To all, therefore, this matter applies, not only in its general character as a "sign of the times," but in those ways by which, under God's gracious Spirit blessing it in its result, it may be made practically and individually useful to us, in its own specific bearings.

By the laws of our country, and by the laws of other countries, the practice itself of capturing human creatures for slaves has been solemnly condemned; and in the Word of God it is still more condemned. How can that be, I am asked, when, in the very first setting forth of apostolical truth, directions are given for conduct, which virtually recognise the relationship wherein only those directions could operate?

Christianity came into a world polluted with every stain which could disgrace the character of man, and mark an aggregate of sin sufficient for the judicial ruin of a second world. But Christianity came like its Divine Master, with a "still small voice," to win the listener; and not with the violent threat of an immediate

overthrow to long-established feelings and riveted habits among the walks of civil society, to alienate the mind still more from things spiritual. To what was in itself sinful in individuals, or at once opposed to the principles of the Gospel, in its first introduction into the world, Christianity uttered forth the thunder of its utmost power; and "the terrors of the "Lord" were blended with the constraining love of Christ, to give the immediate sanction to essential Gospel truth. But Christianity dealt with the world as it was, not as it would be, in much that concerned man as a member of civilized society; and, exercising a kindly influence, and imparting its pure and heaven-born unction of a holy and an evangelical principle, left it to work its own way, this little leaven gradually to leaven the whole lump. The distinction was early shown between "milk "for babes," and "strong meat" for matured adults. And so I would deduce the only right construction of whatever Scripture passage may seem to countenance, what the spirit of Scripture universally and most explicitly condemns. Read thus in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, "One "is your master, even Christ; and all ye are "brethren." (St. Matth. xxiii. 8.) "As the

“body is one, and hath many members, and all
“the members of that one body, being many,
“are one body, so also is Christ: for by one
“Spirit we are all baptized into one body,
“whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we
“be bond or free.” (1 Cor. xii. 12, 13.) See
with what company Scripture associates the
man-stealer: “The lawless and disobedient—
“the ungodly, and—sinners, unholy, profane,
“murderers of fathers and murderers of mo-
“thers, man-slayers, whoremongers, them that
“defile themselves with mankind, *men-stealers*,
“liars, perjured persons, and if there be any
“other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine.”
(1 Tim. i. 9, 10.) Read the Saviour’s own
great summary of the principle of all our rela-
tive duties as fellow men: “All things what-
“soever ye would that men should do to you,
“do ye even so to them: for this is the law
“and the prophets.” (St. Matth. vii. 12.)
Read thus in God’s Word, and then be your
own hearts the judge whether the comment I
put before you do not entirely comport with
the verities of our Christian faith.

Upon the great matter of a final termination
to what divine and human law manifestly forbid,
it seems to be the conclusion, at which the wise

and good, who have well considered it, have arrived, that it should not be an instantaneous termination. A sudden emancipation of those many thousands who have been so long under bondage in mind as in body, it is thought would be productive of ruinous and extensive ill to the present and immediately succeeding generations of them. Be it so. We will take it as thus determined for our purpose, and adopt the conclusion that the entire freedom of *body* from entire slavery had better be a progressive thing. But, when I look to the congregation before me, and know that they profess Christianity, must I say of these our brethren, removed from us only by another colour and another climate, that we must be tardy also in proclaiming liberty to their *souls*; linger long before we bid them, as fellows in an earthly sphere of sin and sorrow, "God speed" under our own "glad tidings," and in spiritual things be backward in telling them to "stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made them," as well as ourselves, "free?" God forbid. What says our text? "Remember them that are in bonds." And how can you remember them, as yourselves invited into the liberty of Christ, unless you remember them for their

spiritual good, and invite them to a glorious participation of your own privileges?

Many among us have no local interest in actual possession of the bodies of these wretched labourers, who are labouring for us all; but not one among us but has an imperative call to take vital interest in the bettering the condition of their *souls*. It is not white or black that makes it soul, or no soul. The tie which, here at home, links us together in the bonds of Christian communion as a household of faith professing godliness, should link us as closely, in human and sympathizing interest, with every colour of our race unto the world's end. What though there be no annual revenue to yourself, and your sources are from other labour than from the coercive thralldom riveted by its iron grasp upon the scourged and degraded bodies of your natural equals—brothers in your origin, dust and sin; brothers in your eternal destiny, life eternal or death eternal—are you, therefore, the less called upon, as professing Christianity, to turn a willing ear to their spiritual wants in all that is implied for us and them in—"Have we not all one Father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother?"

(Mal. ii. 10.) Recognise this Christian inference; and though you own no inch of soil whereon the African brother drags on his daily toil, in daily slavery, for your own coffer, still “remember those that are in bonds.” Catch at the golden opportunities now in mercy before you, for bettering the condition of their souls, in the unshaken expectation of paving the way for ultimately emancipating their bodies. “Freely ye have received, freely give.” Give your influence, give your money, and above all things give your most fervent prayers for the great “work and labour of love,” now going forward amid our slave fellow-subjects, in matter pertaining to their souls. You will then have an interest in them, far better than what any *legal* claim can give: you need not their enslaved bodies, and their forced services exacted by what, on English ground, must not with impunity be inflicted on a beast,—you need not this as your argument; for you will then in spirit anticipate the period, and in spirit rejoice to be the means of hastening it in its time, when God’s Word shall be to them also accomplished: “Even unto them will I
“give in mine house, and within my walls, a
“place and a name better than of sons and of

“daughters: I will give them an everlasting
“name, that shall not be cut off” (Isaiah lvi. 5.)

If these be duties incumbent upon all in regard to the “sign of the times” now before us, how much more are they pressed upon those among us who have local interests and personal property in the bodily labour of a slave population, by human law, vested in their ownership!

You, my brethren, have indeed an awful warning in the dispensation of God manifested in our day, whereby he hath been pleased to turn the hearts of kings, governors, and nations to pity, and to endeavour to befriend, the common and vital interests of suffering humanity. You stand in a most fearful relationship; and God sees it, and man recognises it. You are, by hereditary right or legal purchase, actual lord and possessor of the enslaved bodies of your fellow men. By human law, they must work for and obey you; by human law, you may punish them if they do not work; and by human law how rarely, and with what difficulty, can you be called to any account? By human law they are your strange property, and under your legal ownership over them, they must stand ready all their life long to obey your

commands, to labour for your worldly advantages; or you may sell them in a market to work for other masters. For this possession of power over the bodies of your fellow-creatures, you have the same legal claim which sanctions the holding of any other possession which human laws have given and secured to their respective owners. Upon this ground, and under this view of it, you stand, as we all stand in regard to earthly possessions, with your legal claim upon this your temporal property. In this view of the subject, therefore, upon the mere point of legal ownership, I may adopt the language of the Apostle to his Corinthian converts, and say, "I write not these things to 'shame you,' for they did not originate with you; 'but as my beloved sons, I warn you.'" (1 Cor. iv. 14.) For if God have now, in his merciful providence as a universal father, brought men's minds so generally to feel as they do feel, and *would* gladly *act* upon this great and momentous subject, and so speaks to us all by a "sign of the times," think, my brethren, how strongly he speaks to you! How he presses the consideration of your own mercies, as the ground for the extension of them to those who have all the human capa-

bilities which you have, and who are subject to the same bondage, in things spiritual, from which the knowledge of the Gospel of Jesus Christ hath proclaimed, in your ears, a most glorious emancipation. Say that your conscience may be at peaceful rest in your *legal* property over them. Will that exempt you from even still deeper and more anxious consideration of the reciprocal duties of this extraordinary relationship? If they work for your earthly consolations, if you "reap their carnal things, is it a great thing for you to sow unto them spiritual things?" This, my brethren, is one great and manifest token of this "sign of the times," to whatever still greater extent it may haply speak. It calls upon you, in this especial matter, to "remember them that are in bonds."

And here I need not dwell much upon the rightful mode whereby you may fulfil this Christian call. The path is plain before you. As professed disciples of Jesus Christ you are bound to make his sovereign mercy known. Your light must shine: and where can it brighter shine than where all, save its own glorious rays now scarcely beginning to beam forth, is perfect darkness? Pour its

gracious truths fully and freely among your poor degraded slaves, your fellows;—fellow-sufferers, and fellow-sinners;—under the true Christian feeling, that the swarthy tincture of their body is but the faintest emblem of the awful darkness which envelopes their soul. Tell them, that though in bodily slavery they are deprived of a liberty which you enjoy, yet that in spiritual slavery to the law of corruption and sin, that total darkness of the soul, there is no other difference among men, save only where it is dispersed by that Sun of Righteousness who hath arisen with “healing on his wings.” These glad tidings proclaim to them gladly. Hitherto little is done. A mother country at home has not yet imposed an authority which colonial provisions abroad will meet and sanction: her best, her wisest, her most humane provisions have been almost every where at once resisted. And so little by our own law itself is done, that at this very moment our Court groans under its legal decision, that the public feeling and opinion, which led us to the expected hope that a slave once free was for ever free, were not founded upon law; and that though the first tread upon English ground emancipates the captive, a

return to the land of slavery rivets her chains afresh. Till more, therefore, be done by the sovereign arm of law, do you meet of these evils what may be met, by the merciful and gracious provisions of the Gospel. Promote the knowledge of Christ among them; and as professed members of our own Church, do your utmost to promote the introduction of Christianity to their benighted souls, under its truly evangelical character, through the ministration of Christian bishops. Aid them at once, stimulate and encourage them in the utmost zeal of Christian love in their great office over your poor dependents: meet them in every possible shape. Instruct through their schools; preach through their encouraged ministry, encouraged and befriended by all *your* local influence, and fullest expenditure of means. Thus by your exercise of the power which human laws have given you, show your poor slaves in distant lands that, while you live by the sweat of their brow, you remember their bonds: tell them of Him whom you profess to know, but whom they know not; tell them of "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness;" and, if you can add the experienced testimony of your own heart, go on

with this holy text, and tell them that he "hath shined in" your "hearts, to give the "light of the knowledge of the glory of God, "in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Cor. iv. 6.)

But here, my brethren, on this point I stop. If this *be* your case, and your hearts are warm in love, and humbled under a sense of your own personal interest in a redeeming Saviour, you need no argument from me to make you forward in bringing your poor dependents abroad to the knowledge of Him whose love is bounded by no place nor time, and whose redemption is a purchased gift for every colour. You already work his work among them, and grieve that you do not, perhaps cannot, work more.

If, on the other hand, your own souls be dead and heedless in things spiritual, how can you be otherwise than listless, perhaps with much hostility of feeling opposed, to any and to every means suggested or adopted for teaching enslaved bodies, that there is within them an immortal and a redeemed soul? How can you be willing to have preached to them, what heretofore you value not for yourselves? How will you be prevailed upon to regard a "sign "of the times" for them also to profit by, in

your Christian privileges, when you value them not yourself? How can you tell of a sign to them, when all, but your own heart, see and grieve, God and holy Angels above, and penitent fellow sinners on earth, that as yet you regard no sign from heaven, and to every sign, significantly speak its instant dismissal from your thoughts?

If, my brethren, in your hardened indifference to these your bondmen in soul as in body, your understanding has been convinced by the evidences of Christianity, and so you are compelled to believe it true, I will speak to you of a day, a great and terrible day, in Christianity made known to us all, wherein these matters will be finally adjusted. My argument demands the supposition, which God of his redeeming mercy make utterly void! that you die, as you live, regardless of the interests of your own soul, and therefore indifferent to the souls at this moment tabernacled in bodies over which, by human law, you have sovereign controul. The distinctions, under which you lived and died in this life, on that day will not be recognised. You must stand on equal terms with your earthly bondmen, and each be judged according to his works. Should he also be condemned

for the sins which he committed against the light of conscience, your condemnation must be heavier far than his. Over eternally lost Sodom and Gomorrah the Saviour himself declared, that a less bitter portion awaited them at the Judgment, than those people and languages among which the light of his Gospel offered itself to shine. This will be the illustration of your own judgment from himself. Your bondman on earth knew not the Lord ; that Lord you never taught him : he perished in his ignorance ; that ignorance you never heartily sought to remove. He sinned from the corruption that was within him : his vices were unchecked by you ; nay, more than this, you, or those who personally represented you, promoted their direful increase. An example was before him, and taught him the practical and contagious lesson, that a sensual life is the end of man ; and that “ Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die,” was not more adopted in the creed of the depraved heathen, than made manifest in the life of him who professed Christianity. He felt all this in its pernicious influence over him here. Sin gained that empire over his soul, which you exercised over his body ; and sin for ever destroyed both you

and him : his slavery and your dominion were each accompanied by sin on earth, and each must then be for ever slaves to Satan, under "the wages of sin," which "is death."

If this anticipated description of an event declared in the eternal verity of that Word, which you say you believe to be the Word of God, awaken in you one single thought upon your own soul's slavery to the law of sin, it will soon progressively advance to better things for the enslaved in body as in soul, who are under you. You cannot learn to think for your own soul's redemption in Christ, without a heartfelt desire, and an immediate endeavour to promote theirs. This is the Scripture test : and none other can be safe. Humbled before the cross of the same ever blessed Redeemer, you will then, but then only, join in heart and voice, with your poor dependents in other climes, in magnifying the name whereby alone you may each be saved. And then will you abound, both of you, as in knowledge, so in a most glorious hope ; as in Christian relationship, so in recognition of a Christian and a reciprocal duty : he shall learn what you shall teach of the same all-gracious God, and Saviour, and Holy Sanctifier ; and both thus profit by this

“sign of the times:” a dispensation soon to end in the certain arrival of that time and kingdom, in which we are all equally interested, “where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond or free: but Christ is all, and in all.” (Col. iii. 11.)

SERMON IV.

“THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES.”

2 PETER i. 19, 20.

We have also a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts : knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation.

PROPHECY is the pledge given by Almighty God of his superintending providence in regard to all that is future ; and human experience is the demonstrative proof of the same providence in all that is past. The holy Word of God greatly abounds in the language of prophecy ; so much abounds that it will be found, at the termination of all things, to have been a regular chain of history in the great outline of God's government over the world. We are justified, therefore, by the

importance of prophecy, as well as by the covenant of God himself, in studying its sacred character ; but, at the same time, with exceeding diffidence in the interpretation of it, save those cases only where it hath been manifestly fulfilled. The inspired Apostle St. Peter puts this view of prophecy plainly before us all : to encourage us to look into the prophecies of God, he tells us thus, “ Whereunto ye do well “ that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth “ in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the “ day-star arise in your hearts.” And, at the conclusion of all the prophecies, St. John expressly pronounces a blessing upon those who observe and apply to their spiritual good this mode of manifesting the divine will: “ Blessed “ is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy “ of this book.” (Rev. xxii. 7.)

But that we may not be tempted to scrutinize too closely into the application of an unfulfilled prophecy, St. Peter also, in the text, cautions us thus, “ Knowing this first, that no prophecy “ of the Scripture is of any private interpreta- “ tion ;” that is, that as the prophets themselves “ spake” only “ as they were moved by the “ Holy Ghost,” so those who should come after must never dare to appropriate a prophecy to

an event, unless amply borne out by the manifest providence of God. It is not, then, we may safely conclude, the humble study of the prophecies in every portion of God's Word, which is otherwise than spiritually profitable to us; nay, it is an enjoined duty: but it is the rash and ignorant application of them which the Spirit and the words of Scripture every where forbid.

In these prophecies of the Holy Spirit are distinctly given the rise and fall of two great enemies to the Church of Christ, differing as well in their character as in the mode of their opposition to the truth: one corrupts more by the errors deduced from the true doctrine; the other by violence striving to overthrow it, and substitute other doctrine in its place. These two hostile powers are generally supposed to synchronize in their rise as in their fall; and it has been thought that the downfall of one will be the signal for the extirpation of the other. These two great enemies to the Church of Christ are especially marked in the prophecies of Daniel, and in the revelations made to St. John the Divine: and so plainly are they marked in the different features by which they are described, that all the best commentators

upon these portions of the holy Word of God have not hesitated in the application of them to the Papistical errors of the Church of Rome, and the shameful inventions of the impostor Mahomet.

These two, the first originating in the corruption of the truth, the other in the invention of a falsehood, are spoken of in Scripture as having a beginning and an end: all the enemies of the Gospel must finally fall before it; but inasmuch as these two are described as powerful, bitter, and, under the restraining arm of the Lord preventing their fullest power, as prevailing enemies to the Church of Christ, their fall is spoken of with peculiar and triumphant assurance in the verity of divine truth. But my present object is not to treat upon the prophecies which have described the character, and predicted the final ruin, of these two anti-Christian powers: it would be quite foreign to the plan I at first proposed in drawing your attention to the extraordinary period in which we live, simply for purposes of spiritual usefulness to our own souls. It was that we should view that period as marked by the finger of God calling upon each of us to consider, and to take heed and observe those "signs of the times,"

which many pious and well-informed Christians are now deeming matter of solemn warning to us all. We are now to consider the third of those six which I ventured to put before you:—The undoubted change which has taken place in the once unqualified recognition of Papistical errors, and the apparently impending decrease of the false pretensions of Saracenic superstition, and Mahomedan imposture.

The Word of God has expressly named a limited period, during which these two powers shall prevail; and that then they must come to their end. Did we know the exact time at which to date their commencement, so precisely is their duration marked, that there would be no difficulty in specifying the period of their fall. But this, in his unerring wisdom, the Spirit of Jesus and of prophecy did not see right to do; and that point must be left where we find it, in the deep and hidden counsels of the Most High. Not but that human commentators have thought they have seen reason to assign the commencing, and therefore the terminating, date. But inasmuch as they differ in their opinions, and holy Scripture speaks not so clearly upon the subject as to remove all doubt, I hold it the safe, because the humble way, not to say

or think much upon what God has not clearly revealed. We may, perhaps, rightly conclude, that, comparing the prophetic descriptions and periods with past history, whichever of the calculations suggested by commentators we take, the period of the duration of these two powers must be fast hastening to its close; their end cannot be far off. The significant matter, therefore, to us is, that we live in times when they are manifestly declining fast: we know not but that, for a period, they may revive again; but we certainly know that they can not finally triumph against the Gospel; and we see evidently that they are each waxing old.

Every period in the Christian Church, since these two powers were known to oppose it, has been blest with defenders of the true faith; for when God foretold the corruptions and enmity which would arise, he at the same time comforted his people with the assurance that, in the darkest ages, however depressed and persecuted, they should not be forsaken: "And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and three-score days," the whole period of the oppression, "clothed in sackcloth." (Rev. xi. 3.)

It would far exceed the plan proposed in the

consideration of this subject at all, were I to deduce from the history of what is past those manifest proofs which abound therein, and which show how true and faithful God has been to his gracious word. He hath, indeed, never left his Church without witness; and so the Saviour hath abundantly fulfilled his parting testimony, "lo, I am with you alway, even "unto the end of the world." (St. Matth. xxviii. 20.) The peculiar providences by which he hath accomplished this merciful promise are visibly displayed to every honest inquirer into the history of the Church of Christ, from that day to the present; and to its sufficient manifestation in the page of history I must now be content to refer you. Minor opposition to these gigantic powers, interspersed amid the records of the past, will bring you down to the glorious æra of the Reformation, an epoch in the history of the Church of Christ wherein every enemy to the pure doctrines of the Cross, with Roman Catholicism at their head, received their death blow. For though the opposition was primarily made, in the acquirement of true knowledge, to the papistical usurpation; yet so much was the world thereby enlightened, that the way

was quite paved for the discovery of all error, Papistical, Pagan, or Saracenic, and ultimately for its utter extirpation. When the imposition of the See of Rome, lording it so long over God's heritage, was discovered, and the glorious champions of the faith, and martyrs in the cause of Christ, bared their arms to fight against it; Satan's reign was threatened, not merely as exercised in papal sovereignty and vaunted infallibility, but as ruling in the influence of pagan darkness, and Mahommedan imposture. Since that period, with violent interruptions from the enemies of the Lord, each power that has opposed "the kingdom of our God, and of his Christ," has continued to decline, if not in some instances in measured acres of territory, undoubtedly in opinion and feeling in the hearts and understanding of mankind.

Had the errors of the papal tyranny, cramping the minds of the infatuated victims to its power, and enriching the coffers, and contributing to the real luxuries and external austerities of a secularized priesthood, had these errors been earlier examined, they would have fallen earlier. But that men dared not to do. Thereign of a spiritual usurpation was complete;

and ruled the thoughts, as well as influenced the writings, of the few who thought at all. But "God said, Let there be light; and there was light." When the Bible was examined, truth beamed forth from the Bible; and the nations gradually resumed their Christian privileges, and soon found that it was not the priestcraft of a secular Church, concealing matter which they dare not teach, and enforcing observances which God hath not commanded, that could satisfy the soul in itself lost, and by no papistical indulgence to be forgiven; but that the soul could be satisfied only by "the holy Scriptures, which are able to make" men "wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus." (2 Tim. iii. 15.) Since that revival of Christian knowledge dawned upon the Christian world, the errors of the papacy have been gradually dying away. Even in *Catholic* countries, with but very few exceptions, the fall of the once unbounded power of this Antichrist is visible to every one. Errors grounded upon ignorance must vanish, as knowledge resumes its proper office. But in *Protestant* countries, where Roman Catholicism is tolerated, under that Christian spirit which allows every man's conscience its proper liberty

herein, so much is conceded by the members of the Roman Church of its errors now manifest to all, that they would seem almost disposed to make it appear that Roman Catholicism and Protestantism were one. In this concession we have a strong argument to prove the great decrease of its influence and authority, though it cannot nullify, as a vindication of that false Church itself, its still existing formularies, its missals, and its decrees. To these we must go for the real character of that Church, and not to the altered opinions of her better taught members. Unchanged, and in herself unchangeable, she still remains; she changes not, according to the sure word of prophecy, for reform as a Church; but persists in error until her final and eternal ruin. In the mean time modern recantation of those among her members who still hold to her communion, of many of her most false and absurd positions, is the argument of our day that her influence wanes fast. Were the bold avowals of those members of the Church of Rome who live in Protestant countries, or who live as a nation with their national Roman Catholic Creed by general consent weakened and relaxed, were they to live as now they live, and avow what now they

avow, in countries where their priesthood still bears unlimited rule, we know where an inquisitorial power is lodged which would make them victims to concealed torment, and show them that they were unacknowledged sons of a Church which they had belied.

And while I thus lead your thoughts to the visible display of Almighty Power in the manifest decrease, in our day, of the long-established errors of this anti-Christian power, I have but to refer you to the present position of those countries where the imposture of Mahomet still prevails, as pointing to the same result. Large, indeed, those countries are in territorial extent. But so surrounded are they now becoming with the bright beams of Gospel truth breaking in upon their darkness on every side; so visibly is this leaven beginning to work among many of them; so glaring are their absurdities in every thing connected with their Koran Creed; so weak and insignificant are they in the scale and influence of nations, that we have argument enough before us to believe of Mahomedan usurpation that its reign is now verging to its end. It is not with the religion of Mahomet, as it has been with the decrees and power of the Vatican. This

latter has fiercely ruled the enslaved consciences; while the former has led pleurably along with it the natural will and opinions of its deluded followers; and while papal Rome has thus established a tyranny under a reign of spiritual ignorance and terror, the impostor of Arabia hath not been unseated from his mosque, simply because the great powers of Europe were not agreed among themselves who should do it: a political jealousy among these seems to have been the sole prop of a people so kept by the providence of God for the final accomplishment of his great purposes. Upon any other view it would not have been credible that a system, in religion so evidently false and absurd; a line of despotic rule over their own people so revolting to the enlightened nations around them, could so long, and with such small interruption, have subsisted in the world.

And now, my brethren, in thus viewing the present state of these two anti-Christian powers, we cannot but mark the difference which exists between what they each respectively, at this moment, are; and what, when unexamined in their false pretensions through the surrounding darkness of other people, they once were. There is a difference which, to the most superfi-

cial beholder, manifestly bespeaks an approaching termination. But, at the same time, it would not be well, till more shall yet transpire; with too much boldness to say positively that the end of them is so nigh, as that man could assign its boundaries; nor, with listless indifference to the events passing over them in this their later history, to assert that it must necessarily be far off. When they fall, a great epoch shall have occurred, according to the sure word of prophecy; and therefore a manifest tendency in both towards their extinction should not be suffered to pass by without Christian circumspection and regard. As a church of Christ, knowing that the events and final destiny of that church are the subject of a line of prophecy, fulfilling and to be fulfilled unto the end of its character as a church militant here on earth, we are called upon to the most constant watchfulness for every great human incident which affects its spiritual interests. This, as the general position, points out individual duty; and when, as in the case before us, God's providence seems specially at work, it is our business to wait in the attitude of willing learners from "the signs of the times." For aught, indeed, that man can positively calculate upon, in our

day, perhaps these powers, improbable as we may venture to think it, may for a period revive again. But that consideration would not do away the lesson intended, under the present awful aspect of things around us, to be made spiritually profitable to ourselves.

And how better, my brethren, can we apply this matter to our souls, than in pondering our own state and condition in its contrast with these two: our free and unrestrained use and knowledge of the pure Word of God, the Holy Scriptures, as opposed to the very restricted use of scripture at all, and the gross errors of human teaching in the case of papistical usurpation; and our entire light, in the full possession of the gospel of Jesus Christ, as in contrast with the thick darkness of Koran falsehood and superstition, in the inventions of him, also termed the prophet? When God shows his truth, he justly expects that his people receive the truth, and walk in the light of the truth. And does not that light, remembering these two great enemies to the truth whose case we have now adverted to as calling us to consider, does not that light shine around us? In an eager theory, we all acknowledge it; but there is a question herein, which we are each bound to

ask our own hearts. Do we walk in the light? Protestants against Papistical errors, do we seek and apply the truth; unhurt, under the shield of a true faith, by Mahommedan imposture, do we live as disciples of our great and only Prophet, our Emmanuel, who has not deceived his people?

You, my brethren, whose consciences can testify, and whose lives can evidence your entire acceptance of "the truth as it is in Jesus;" who love the truth, and seek the truth, and know that from the indwelling power of sin, the art of your spiritual foe, and from the temptations of the world around you, none other thing can set you free; do you live still mindful of your calling, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. If Satan's empire over any portion of God's world is being contracted in its range, with threat towards its final termination, he will put redoubled power forth to maintain his tottering throne. The true believer, wherever in country he dwell, whatever in rank and condition of life he be, the true believer will be the especial object of Satan's rage. For God works by means; and the prayers and the alms of the faithful put up to the Throne in the prevailing name, Satan knows will be power-

ful testimonies in the cause of Christ ascending thus "in memorial before God." Be prepared, therefore, in the strength of the Lord. With him go forth "conquering and to conquer." While you live in the world, see that you are not of the world: be liberated from its cares, stand aloof from its pleasures; and let your cares be in and for "the things which are "Jesus Christ;" your pleasures those which he, by his Spirit, gives you here, and prepares for you hereafter, "at God's right hand for "evermore." Be bold in the cause of Christ. Awakened to your own soul's interest, be watchful over yourselves; pitying the unawakened state of others, be affectionately alive to their truest happiness in your common Redeemer. In the management of your life and conduct, as regards your own interest in Christ, remember, "no man that warreth, "entangleth himself with the affairs of this life, "that he may please him who hath called him to "be a soldier" (2 Tim. ii. 4); and in anxious Christian love towards all your fellow creatures, in reference to their eternal interests, never for one moment forget, in temper, intercourse, and manner of life, the words of the Lord Jesus; "Let your light so shine before men, that they

“ may see your good works, and glorify your
“ Father which is in heaven.” (St. Matt. v. 16.)

To you, my brethren, who hitherto regard no sign from without, nor act upon any painful warning from within, ever urging you with tenderest remonstrance to believe, repent, and obey ; to you I offer that which I have ventured to speak of as a sign of the times, as an awakening call from your sleep of sin unto a life of righteousness. Christ’s message hath already been frequently, in outward providence, and in the means of grace sounded in your ears ; but you have not hearkened to it. Christ’s invitation “ Come unto me,” hath been ever before you, and still you go not to him. In external profession, as a member of the true church of Christ, you are right as against the enslaved to the errors of the papacy ; in surrounding light, as living amid its rays, you are shone upon though not enlightened, when you avow your belief of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and would reject with contempt, the follies and the falsehoods of Mahommedanism. But living in acknowledged sin, with conscience resisted or unawakened ; or living with careless or with a feigned indifference to the solemn matter of gospel truth ; how are you safer in knowledge

than the misled papist ; how are you purer in heart and life than the benighted follower of the Koran ? Would you but consider not only the religion but the reason of the thing, your case would present itself to your mind in far more dangerous character than theirs. Did not the Saviour himself pronounce his heavy woe against Jerusalem offered to be enlightened with his truth, in contrast with the lighter judgment upon cities and countries where his gospel had not been ? Can your natural reason resist the wisdom and the equity with which he spake, when he declared, that, “unto whomsoever
“much is given, of him shall be much re-
“quired?” (St. Luke xii. 48.) Exercise your mere reason herein aright, and it may haply be blest to your looking at last to the doctrines of grace. It is an omnipotent Saviour who bids you do so ; and though you have heretofore rejected him, he still repeats, but possibly may not much longer repeat, for your hearing, “Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise
“cast out.” Go, my brethren, unto him ; and prove, in a happy experience, that Jesus Christ is true.

SERMON V.

"THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES."

JEREMIAH iii. 14, 15.

Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord ; for I am married unto you ; and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion ; and I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.

WHEN I first ventured to draw your attention to the eventful period in which we live, it was with the most express caution, on my part, that your minds should be directed to the plain matter of personal holiness, and not to any useless and unwarranted surmises as to what the manifest "signs of the times" might import of any thing yet future. The warning which God gives in his visible and providential interferences in the guidance of circumstance affecting the destiny of empires, or in the

minute superintendence of cause and effect in which individuals alone are concerned, the warning for immediate and spiritual thought and improvement is plain and practical. It is not, indeed, a sinful and rash presumption for the humble-minded inquirer, through the written revelation of God, to look into the ways and counsels of God, when manifest events show that his voice, in mercy or in judgment, is speaking to the inhabitants of the earth; but still the Christian will proceed herein with all the caution, which holy Scripture itself gives, against any hasty conclusions as to what the end may be: "Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known," (Psalm lxxvii. 19.) will be his rule in every consideration of the works and dealings of the Most High God. His sole object will be spiritual good, and not the needless and the sinful gratification of an idle and a forbidden curiosity.

Again, recurring to this sole principle, in regard to the eventful circumstances of our day, I proceed to the fourth among those which pious and considerate Christians every where are more and more deeming to be "signs of the times,"—A manifestly awakened inte-

rest in the Christian world to the great and peculiar doctrines of the Gospel; and a visible and an acknowledged dying away of that listlessness and that indifference to their spiritual post, which for so long a period marked and disgraced the Christian Ministry.

The text which I have read to you from the prophet Jeremiah is a portion of one of the prophecies relating to the gospel times. It contains an affectionate remonstrance from God to his people Israel, under the image of the nearest and tenderest of all human ties: "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord, for I am married unto you."

It speaks of their gradual restoration to their long-lost privileges: "I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion." It tells them of better teachers of the better way: "and I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding." All this will apply, in allowed adaptation, to any period in the history of the church of Christ, wherein a knowledge of the truth revives, and those whose office it is to teach the truth are themselves becoming

awakened to a sense of what they vowed to God, and of what they owe to man.

That in such a period we, my brethren, ourselves live, is proved by matter of no lighter argument than that of historical demonstration. Take a cursory survey of the history of the world since the commencement of the Christian æra: contemplate those epochs which have been designated, in comparative character, as epochs of religious knowledge and intellectual advance: and none will appear in any respect marked, as is this our own day, with the general diffusion of a feeling which condemns the past cold reception of the vital doctrines of Christianity, and better recognizes their proper influence upon the affections, as well as their intended force upon the understanding.

We need not for this purpose go minutely into the history of former centuries; the period which most nearly affects ourselves is the period of the Reformation, and the contrasted times, subsequent to that, during the reign of our second Charles. The Reformation laid the Scriptures open to those from whom their sacred page had been purposely and most shamefully hidden: Gospel truth revived; and the doctrines of the cross were, as they had been in the first

and purest ages of the church, what a holy and an apostolical writer has declared them to be: "But if either the one or other do not speak concerning Christ Jesus, they seem to me to be but as monuments and sepulchres of the dead, upon which are written only the names of men." "Nevertheless," continues the holy Ignatius, the martyred bishop of the church of Antioch, and a disciple of St. John the Evangelist, "I exhort you that you do nothing out of strife, but according to the instruction of Christ. Because I have heard of some who say, Unless I find it written in some other ancient monuments, I will not believe the gospel. And when I answered them, It is written: they replied, That it does not appear.. But to me Jesus Christ is in stead of all the ancient monuments in the world: together with those undefiled monuments, his cross, and death, and resurrection, and the faith which is by him." (St. Ignat. Ep. Philadelph.)

This was the common feeling of the Christian church during its purest and primitive character under the government of those ministers who had been ordained by the apostles themselves, and had personal communication with them. The doctrines of the cross were

the sole foundation of their hope, the frequent subject of their mutual intercourse, and mutual consolation and rejoicing, and the fruitful principle of their holy, pious, and charitable demeanour under all the relationships of life.

After much corruption of these doctrines, and suppression of their plain and simple statements from the people, under various errors and arbitrary exactions, which, after the first few centuries, began to creep in, the light of the glorious Reformation brake in upon the world, and the true gospel of Christ was restored. Our own church took a decided lead in shaking off false doctrines, traditions, and "the commandments of men," and formed and purified her creed upon the eternal basis of the unmixed Word of Christ. Its character became purely evangelical, after the model of the evangelical times.

In the period which succeeded the distracted time of the church and state under the hypocritical pretensions of the Protectorate, and the errors, mixed with much evangelical truth, in the preceding times of the Puritans during the reign of Elizabeth, there was much avowed enmity and opposition expressed and manifested to pure gospel truth; and the reign of our

second Charles became the death-blow to the vitality of religion, for a long time to come. Himself and those about him, immersed in the dissoluteness of an extravagant and sensual life, made the acknowledged hypocrisy of the Cromwell times, and the confessed errors of the Puritans, in those points in which they did err, the avowed pretext for throwing off all religion which in any degree savoured of vital godliness. From that period England, as a nation, laboured under those evils, in her moral and religious character, which are incident to all forms of faith and church government, wherein the spirit of the Gospel is forgotten, amid some generalizing observance of outward ordinances. With little other variation than what may be discerned in the lives and writings of some pious followers of the true faith, this state of things more or less continued among us, until the diabolical principles of the French philosophy opened the eyes of thousands, to what the enemies of the Gospel were endeavouring to accomplish against all moral and religious obligations whatever. From that eventful epoch there has been a gradual, but a manifest change. The cold positions in general repute, and generally taught from the pulpit, and which savoured far

more of ethnick morality than of evangelical doctrine and holy precept, have been yielding to the purer matter of Christian teaching: the minds of men have been awakened by a thirst after the life-giving doctrines of the Gospel; and it is now made matter of personal feeling every where, that the religion of Jesus Christ must not be supplanted by the dry maxims of moral philosophy, nor its humbling character lost sight of in the proud and self-sufficient pretensions of human merit, and a supposed inherent righteousness.

The latter part of the text brings the other point of a reformed character before us: "And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding." Yes, my brethren, it was the watchmen forgetting the duties of their post which has been the great cause, if not for the first origin, at least for the long continuance, of a cold and lifeless religion in our Church, from which, blessed be God, we are at last beginning to escape. The Clergy were much sunk, in the security of the establishment of the true faith as our national creed, in sloth, wealth, and self-indulgence; and their secularizing character became a habit of the times.

There was nothing, humanly speaking, to remove it. Their destiny to the sacred profession of Ministers of the Gospel was, for the most part, settled from the mere circumstance of family preferment; means of an earthly subsistence; or because they were deemed fit for nothing else. Hence the duties of the priesthood were necessarily neglected. The double service of our Lord's Day's worship ceased to be performed; and in most parishes one service in the week, and, in many, service on alternate weeks, and even at greater intervals, marked the unwilling labour of the professedly devoted Ministry of the Church. Hence, too, spiritual intercourse between the Minister and his flock was scarcely known; and in those cases where he did reside among them, the duty was deemed satisfied, if a message from some sick or dying sinner procured a short and hasty reading of a prescribed office, or a lifeless administration of a supposed sacramental seal for the pardon of a mispent life, and a charm to waft the soul to heaven. Could it have been otherwise than this, when our public journals teemed with advertisements for spiritual posts in the Lord's vineyard, described with appendages better suited to the transfer of an earthly

possession ripe for the wild enjoyment of some ignorant feudal baron, supported by the prey which the forest around his castle might yield to the feats of his own arm?

And what was the accredited preparation for the sacred office of the Ministry? What, but a heedless and an extravagant passing through a few obsolete and useless forms of ancient regimen in places termed nurseries for the learned professions; but which, in the comparative absence of learning as of religion, were but the laughing-stock of Europe, and our own disgrace? Happily, on this point, some manifest change has been accomplished; and *opportunity*, at least, is better afforded in these ancient seats of, what were originally, the piety and the learning of the land, for the acquirement of useful and religious knowledge. When, in the progress of spiritual improvement every where, more shall be done in these our ancient Universities, to bring them back to what they have, by charter and foundation rule, always professed to be, places of moral and religious discipline, as well as of mental cultivation and learning; when parents can send their youth under better feeling than can now be indulged, that their boy shall not be suffered to indulge in every dissi-

pated and extravagant habit under restraint easily evaded, and with cold indifference strangely manifested in quarters where indifference is the besetting sin ; when parents can hope that their own means shall not be drained by the permitted, . because not effectually checked, extravagance of these seats of learning, nor their other children left helpless and destitute through the unrestrained selfishness, and shameful extravagance of one ; when such an epoch arrives, and it is at least a portion of the character of these times to hope for its approach under the general revival of the truths of the everlasting Gospel, then shall the climax be wound up for this part of our national reformation, and a piously educated priesthood shall better meet their awfully solemn charge of souls that cannot die.

It could not be but that under such spiritual pastors, betrayed in their education, secularized in their habits, false to their ordination vows, and ignorant of their ministerial duties, because ignorant and unawakened to the consideration of Gospel truth, it could not be but that ignorance, sin, and carelessness should every where abound. The memory of many of us, and the history of the thing open to us all, substantiate

painfully this painful fact. Hence it was that our Church itself fell into disesteem. The loose, and careless, and secularized lives of her ministers brought disgrace upon herself. For it required more scriptural knowledge, and more knowledge of what our Church is in herself, her origin, her principles, her doctrines, and her rule, than what the times afforded, to bring more sober-minded people to understand and apply the provision which Christ himself had made for this identical condition, at any period, of his true Church: "The Scribes and "the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat;" have real ministerial authority derived unto them from God: "all, therefore, whatsoever they bid you "observe, that observe and do; but do not ye "after their works: for they say and do not." (St. Matt. xxiii. 2, 3.) No wonder that under such misunderstanding on the part of the untaught people, and such shameful dereliction of their duty on the part of the ministers of religion, schism should have sprung up around us; and that under the ardent zeal of its leaders, and the ignorant condition of their followers, it should have passed on as a slight and venial thing, and that the assurance of Scripture, that schism is a sin against God, should have been forgotten.

To meet these ills in the ministrations of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, it has pleased God to give a different tone to the character of numbers in the Christian Ministry at the present day. There has evidently been, and still is, an outpouring of the Spirit in these latter days; and the Ministers of the Gospel are manifestly becoming more and more under its holy influence, and more and more devoted to the right understanding and better discharge of the duties of their sacred calling. They are brought into the ministry under far stricter examination of the prescribed requisites for their solemn office; and the increasing knowledge and practice of evangelical truth around them, in their preparation for their holy calling, better fits them in the Spirit of Christ to "do the work of an Evangelist."

And here, my brethren, let me add one word of advice in the way of immediate application of this especial point. If, in the truth of God's holy Word, you can know the value of an awakened ministry, yourself awakened to the same cause, "Christ crucified" and souls redeemed; or if, in mere reason, you see how good it ever must be that the Church of Christ be served by faithful ministers; put up your frequent

prayers to the Throne of grace that it may be so. This was the warm injunction of the holy and zealous Paul to all the Churches: "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication—that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the Gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak." (Eph. vi. 18—20.)

One consequent to the revival of the true knowledge of the doctrines of grace, and a demonstrative proof that that revival is taking place, will be violent, bitter, and unceasing opposition to it. Satan will not easily be unthroned from the hearts and opinions of mankind; and this our own day entirely manifests. There is a fulfilment of the Scripture prophecy herein: "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. iii. 12); persecution unto death, when fire and the sword are Satan's instruments against Christ; and malice, false inferences, unkindly misrepresentations, contempt, personal obloquy, and reproach, when fire and sword are restrained by the penal enactments of human law.

See, my brethren, for your own spiritual warning, and watchfulness, and implicit trust in the power of Christ, how this persecution is manifested in our day.

Some of the enemies to the plain and simple truth of the Gospel corrupt it by strange intermixtures of teaching that comes not from God; while others destroy at once the grand and peculiar mark of Christ's religion with the dangerous and presumptuous assertion, against the plainest assertions of unperverted Scripture, that "God" was *not* "manifest in the flesh;" and that man needs no sacrifice for sin; that "without shedding of blood" there is "remission;" and that man is pure and holy by penitence for the past, and so can save himself.

Some oppose the very spirit of the Gospel by hoping to do an impossible thing; enjoy this world in worldly pleasures and pursuits, and secure the spiritual joys of an eternal heaven, where all is spiritual and heavenly. Such have too much knowledge to remain without some show of religion to lull the keenest inflictions of conscience to rest, and so deceive themselves to their own eternal ruin: but they have too little sense of what the Gospel really is, in what of duty it requires, as well as in divine redeem-

ing love it offers, to receive the "whole counsel
"of God," the simple "truth as it is in Jesus;"
—"Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

But it is the consolation to the true Church of Christ, that its enemies shall not overthrow it: it is built upon a rock; that rock is Christ, and the gates of hell are not to prevail against it. To you, my brethren, who have received the truth now more and more enlightening the world, our best, our only consolation, and the sure stability of our times, as well as to you who reject it altogether, or corrupt it in your own mutilating treatment thereof, to each of you remains the solemn lesson of your great responsibility. The truths of the everlasting Gospel have revived among us, and are no more mixed, as once they were generally, with qualifying circumstance as to make it no Gospel; or with man's vain additions as to make it a false one: they are taught as they were taught by Christ and the Apostles and the purest ages of the Christian Church. What other inference, then, can there be, but that we regard this gracious "sign of the times" in all its scriptural bearing, in all its awakening character?

As members of a Church "professing god-

liness," you profess to believe this Gospel; for there is none other given to man. Examine your own hearts as to the reception you give it there: "for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." (Rom. x. 10.)

It is not a barren acknowledgment of the truth beaming forth in your own day, that will prove that you really receive it, and so prove that you belong to Christ. You say you believe the Gospel. Do you feel towards what the Gospel teaches as you feel towards any other truth impressed upon your mind, in reference to the practical effect which, in its different measures of importance, all truth really received must produce upon you? Do you demean yourself in reference to Gospel truth, as you act in reference to other truth, wherein, in its personal application to yourself, you rightly hold yourself responsible? It is one of the temptations of such a day, as is our day, to believe that, as we live amid manifest light, we must therefore and necessarily be children of the light. Watch and pray, my brethren, against this dangerous and common delusion; and take heed, lest with all your

knowledge, you at last perish "through lack of knowledge."

Beware, too, of the temptation incident to our happy times of an increasing Gospel light, of substituting true knowledge in the place of holy living. You can never be deceived herein, if you consult the Gospel itself: for that will always show who are Christ's, and who are not Christ's; and will plainly tell that none are Christ's, who, in the conduct of their self-management in daily life, would seem to separate the doctrines of the Cross from the enjoined duty of bearing the cross after Christ, and of following him in holiness, love, and duty, whithersoever he goeth. Compare what now you are with what you once were; and then see whether in heart to believe, and in desire to live, you meet the Christian's test—"if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold all things are become new." (2 Cor. v. 17.) How much in regard to your motive and end operating for your own soul.

In reference to your fellow-creatures, see that your life be conducted toward them upon the great Christian basis of an ardent love; not that love with which the world loves its own;

nor with that love expressed for all, and seemingly manifested for few, or for none: but with that which Christ himself hath taught us all to feel and act upon in our intercourse with each other, upon the sure principle of believing in that great love wherewith Christ hath loved us; for this is the very test of our own interest in Christ's death: "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death" (1 John iii. 14); and the Lord Jesus Christ hath taught us that all mankind are brethren, each to other.

In reference to the Saviour himself, whose holy Gospel is now put forth among us, I could add much to what the mere circumstance of the knowledge of Christ will in itself bring before you. But every thing I have already said, and all that I might more advance, all point to Christ. If the true light of his Gospel shines in your hearts, you will read Christ in every portion of the sacred volume, and seek Christ as the sum and substance of all you now enjoy, and of all you hope for hereafter. A "sign of the times" so leading to Christ, as does the wide diffusion of the true knowledge of his Gospel, will be as welcome to your inmost

soul, and as much move your warmest affections and hopes, as that new, and bright, and glorious star cheered and excited the wondering view of the Eastern Magi, until it guided them to the manger bed of the new-born King. When that star of unusual light "came and stood "over where the young child was," "they "rejoiced with exceeding great joy." (St. Matt. ii. 9, 10.) Do each of you, my brethren, solemnly put the question to your own hearts as to the effect produced there by this sign of our times also. Is "Christ crucified" unto you, as formerly "unto the Jews, a stumbling-block;" or unto you, as formerly "unto the "Greeks, foolishness?" (1 Cor. i. 23.) Or, in an increasing participation of the light shining around us, is it your present experience, or your most earnest hope and endeavour to be enabled to take to yourself the happy conviction of the holy Apostle, "for to me to live is "Christ, and to die is gain?" (Philip. i. 21.) Your heart tells you to which of these questions conscience compels you to give your personal testimony; and you live in times too much enlightened by the truth, not to confess, in argument, the momentous result.

SERMON VI.

"THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES."

ROMANS xi. 25, 26.

Blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved.

THERE is not an argument for the providence of Almighty God more strikingly manifest to us all, than the history of the Jews: and if, in the complexion of the eventful matter of our day, we do not err in the interpretation of it, as matter intended by God for our warning and instruction; there is no portion of it, in itself more interesting, in its consequences more awfully important, than what now seems to affect the spiritual condition of this wonderful people. In reference to this, among the other "signs of the times," I proposed it as the fifth, and worded its character thus,—The interest

felt, and through a considerable portion of the Christian world evidenced by outward deed, for the forlorn and affecting condition of the state of the Jews; a people once greatly beloved, but now, and for many centuries past, cast off and forsaken, until the Divine Word shall speak, "It is enough."

A very brief and general survey of the history of this once favoured nation, separated by miraculous interposition, and a visible theocracy, from all the nations of the earth, will show how the Lord hath spoken to them, and in them to the whole world, in thus making them "a peculiar people." In such a survey of extraordinary interposition as manifested in the Word of God, where their history stands prominently displayed, and as confirmed by every human author who has at all touched upon the subject, we shall see, first, the immediate and miraculous call of their "first father" "Abraham," elected by God himself to be the founder of this mighty people, and through whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ, "the desire of nations," was to spring: for "in Abraham, and in his seed, were all the families of the earth to be blessed." We next follow the Patriarchs believing, but not yet

receiving the promises; their posterity increasing in numbers, and become captive slaves in Egypt; thence led forth by a great deliverance, under the immediate manifestation of divine power; afterwards governed by God's special presence directing them, and by God, as their audible legislator, ruling over them. We see them, nevertheless, rebelling against him, and taking unto themselves the idol worship of the heathen nations around them, God in the mean time showing his unwillingness to give them up, in frequent prophetic warning and inflicted judgment.

But even Divine Mercy, forbearing as it is, forbears not for ever against determined sinfulness; and an entire separation of some of them, and a seventy years captivity for the remainder, was the appointed cure for this especial sin of idolatry. The few of this numerous people who returned to their native land, returned to their former sin no more. But other sins had dominion over them: and when they had "filled up the measure of their iniquities" in rejecting Christ in the very face of their own prophecies, and of his own speaking and working as never man spake or worked before, they were suffered to fall.

But even over their coming ruin, how were they still the pitied objects of a weeping Saviour's love: "And when he was come near, "he beheld the city and wept over it, saying, "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in "this thy day, the things which belong unto "thy peace! But now they are hid from thine "eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, "that thine enemies shall cast a trench about "thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee "in on every side, and they shall lay thee even "with the ground, and thy children within "thee; and they shall not leave in thee one "stone upon another; because thou knewest "not the time of thy visitation." (St. Luke xix. 41—44.) All this has been literally accomplished; the blood of Christ has been upon them and their children for almost eighteen hundred years; and we still see this wonderful people a distinct people, though scattered over the whole earth. They do not merge, as other people have done, into the bodies of the nations by whom they were conquered, or among whom they live; for the Spirit has declared that it shall not be so: "Fear not thou, O Jacob my servant, saith the "Lord, for I am with thee; for I will make a

“full end of all the nations whither I have driven thee; but I will not make a full end of thee.” (Jer. xlv. 28.) They remain for the purposes of further prophecy yet unfulfilled; all summed up in the passage which I have chosen for the text, “Blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in; and so all Israel shall be saved.”

Until this day “the people have dwelt alone, and have not been reckoned among the nations.” Still is there a period spoken of in the eternal counsels of the Most High God, when this people shall again become the people of God: “And the Gentiles,” saith the prophet Isaiah, “shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name.—Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzi-bah,” that is, “my delight is in her;” and thy land, Beulah,” that is, “married;” for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married.” (Isaiah lxii. 2, 4.) “The children of Israel,” saith the Lord by the prophet Hosea, “shall abide many days without

“a king, and without a prince, and without a
“sacrifice, and without an image,” or altar,
“and without an ephod, and without teraphim:
“afterward shall the children of Israel return,
“and seek the Lord their God, and David
“their king; and shall fear the Lord and his
“goodness in the latter days.” (Hosea iii. 4, 5.)

This is a summary of the general promise, scattered throughout the Word of God, that his long-lost people shall be restored. The more particular promise, defined in the marked period for its accomplishment, is named in the text—“until the fulness of the Gentiles be
“come in;” until the Gentile world shall so long have enjoyed the blessings of the Gospel privileges, or its covenant shall have been so long preached to the Gentile world, as that, in the Divine mind, their fulness shall be come in. But prophecy does not more nearly draw the character of the precise time of the conversion of the Jews; and the matter being thus left as one of the hidden things of God, it best becomes us not to be too close in our application, however earnest and diligent we ought to be in watching for the arrival of those “times
“and seasons which the Father hath put in
“his own power.” (Acts i. 7.)

It is matter sufficiently known to the congregation which I now address, that those "times and seasons" are, by many pious and considerate Christians of our own day, deemed to be at hand; and by many, who go not to the full extent of that expectation, it is judged that those times and seasons are at least so to be prepared for by preliminary attention to the forlorn case of this cast-off people, as to justify avowed human means for their ultimate reception into the fold of Christ's flock.

Neither of these opinions would I, my brethren, condemn. God, in the fulfilment of his inscrutable decrees undoubtedly works by means; and whether he conduct his people to their promised land by the pillar of the cloud and fire; by the visible glory of the Shekinah; by the Word of the Lord spoken by his Prophets; or by the united exertions of Christian societies, framed with pious care for cast-off Israel's restoration; it matters not. All are but means in his omnipotent hand. That such feeling should have existed in a considerable portion of the Christian world, as to have led them to form the plan of human aid in the hoped-for furtherance of the great work of the conversion of the Jews, whatever be the final

result, combines, with the other momentous matter of our day, to show that these times are marked.

But while some think thus of an obligation pressed by themselves with pious zeal upon the Christian world, I would deprecate that feeling which might arise in their minds as prejudging those who, watching anxiously and narrowly the providences of the times, are acting upon a conscientious and considerate view in their own minds in abstaining from an overt act, which, at present, they dare not manifest. The argument for such attention to the case of the Jews, as is manifested, being "a sign of the times," is not neutralized by an opinion among others which interferes with their joining in means for an object, in itself, to be ardently desired by all.

The Jews are a peculiar people, and have always been so since the miraculous call of their first father Abraham; and if the conscience of any would tremble at the thought of seeming, in collected energy, and implied construction of time and circumstance, to declare that the fulness of the Gentiles *is* come in, or that God wills human means *now* to be professedly used, for the accomplishment of what they cannot

but deem his own peculiar and miraculous work, let not such be accounted cold and indifferent to souls who know not the Saviour whom their own Scriptures have put before them, or insensible to the imperative duty of ever endeavouring to promote "the kingdom of our God and of his Christ." Such a judgment would but aggravate the pain they cannot but already experience, in being brought to differ in opinion, for conscience sake, from many of the brightest ornaments of Christian piety with which these times abound.

Be it, on the other hand, as far from those who thus abstain from collected human help, that they should condemn the opinions and labours of their Christian brethren who think otherwise. Should those who, in the use of human means, befriend the outcasts of Israel, be acting with the Lord on their side, those who would oppose them would then be found fighting against God. While reasons leading to different results exist to the conscientious and inquiring minds of both, both must be mutually forbearing, and mutually in the exercise of Christian love. It may not manifest a lesser degree of reverence for God's will on the part of those who abstain, because, in conscience,

they are compelled to abstain, than it evinces zeal and Christian labour in those who feel that they can act thus for Israel, and so hope to enlarge the fold of Christ. The difficulty in the use of general and united means avowedly for the purpose of accomplishing, or of paving a way for the accomplishment of, unfulfilled prophecy, oftentimes gives real pain and unaffected regret; but it is not an impediment to the work of individual conversion, whether of Jew or Gentile, whenever providential circumstance and merciful opportunity seem to call for the instrumentality of man. Those who join not in the avowed work, as it respects the Jews in their collective character as a whole body, should still be anxious lookers on, for argument and matter which they shall not be afraid to submit to the Throne of the last Judgment, whether it lead them to join or to abstain from an union with this extraordinary movement of our day. Combined with the other eventful subjects, it marks these latter times as calling upon every one to consider; and though it issue in nothing of the end sought after and expected by those who countenance and promote it, it would still take an allowed position, from the very character and

object of the attempt, among "the signs of the times."

But, my brethren, neither this nor any other extraordinary feature of our day must pass by disregarded by ourselves. There is not an event in public or in private life affecting the moral condition of mankind, whether in large or in circumscribed extent, but God intends that those, before whose eyes that event happens, shall be answerable for its appointed purposes of good.

How, then, are we to regard the extraordinary fact of a large and devoted union of Christians, many of whom are "burning and shining lights" of our day, for the avowed purpose of considering the forlorn case of a people so wonderful in their whole history, as are the people of the Jews, and of promoting the great end of their conversion to the faith of Christ crucified, which the prophecies of God have declared shall, one day or other, be accomplished? Whether we can joyfully unite with these human means, or whether, for the present, we are compelled, for conscience sake, to withhold our individual aid herein, we are each bound to contemplate its procedure, as well as the bare fact of its being in existence at all,

with that solemn, unprejudiced, and waiting expectation, with which we are bound to regard every movement among mankind which has for its professed object, the glory of God, and the good of immortal souls. Whatever view we may each be led to take, we must remember that we are responsible to Almighty God for the purity of our motive, as well as for the pains we are bound to take, and the prayer we should unfeignedly put up to him, that we may be led to see our way plain before us, and join or withhold our influence herein as he shall give us grace and wisdom simply to discern his holy will.

But there will still remain the universal lesson from this sign of our times, that whether we unite as a body in putting "Christ crucified" before the Jewish nation, or not, we take heed that we receive "Christ crucified" ourselves; that we look only to Him to whom blinded Israel will not look.

In the suggestion of this practical inference for us all, were all compelled to utter their own thought, how few would there be among us who would not immediately acknowledge that to "Christ crucified" they did look. Yes, my brethren, so far as living in this Christian land,

and confessing to our Christian creed goes, we certainly all do acknowledge Christ. But with the discriminating eye of your own inward conscience, draw the boundary line between a real, vital, and operative faith, and this lip confession to a Saviour's merits; and then ask whether there be not matter abundant enough, and of weight enough, for the Ministers of Christ's Gospel to press this, or any "sign of the times," upon their respective congregations, which might lead them to the heartfelt acknowledgment of their only, their sufficient Saviour being that "Saviour which is Christ the Lord."

And such an acknowledgment some of you, blessed be God "who maketh you to differ," can and do make in your different measures of a growing faith. Though as against his own people God's prophet could mournfully lament, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom "is the arm of the Lord revealed?" (Isaiah liii. 1.) yet do that prophet's words kindle in your hearts his own confidence in a redeeming Saviour; and in reference to your deliverance, with him you feel—"surely he hath borne our "griefs, and carried our sorrows" (v. 4); in reference to your great deliverer—"I know that

"my Redeemer liveth." (Job xix. 25.) How great are your privileges, when you look to the long lost privileges of the Jews; how great is your light, when you contemplate the spiritual darkness of the Gentile! The Jew was once the enlightened receptacle of the truth; but when Christ "came to his own, his own received him not;" and then was he offered "a light to lighten the Gentiles," and at some future period "to be the glory of his people Israel." Take your great practical lesson herein from the words of the Apostle of us Gentiles: "Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold, therefore, the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but towards thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off." (Rom. xi. 20—22.)

To you, my brethren, who so regard Christ, there is matter enough for warning, for consolation, for encouragement, for gratitude, and for love in this single text, to preclude the necessity of further dwelling on your Christian pri-

privileges than what time now demands that I put before others who think not as you think, and care but little about promoting the knowledge of Christ, either in their own hearts and lives, or for the spiritual good of their fellow creatures. Would God that I were spared from such distinction, and that the time were come wherein it is declared, in the truth of the divine promises, that "they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest." (Heb. viii. 11.)

But these times have not yet arrived. To some of you, my brethren, "Christ crucified," in your inward feelings, and your outward walk in life, is as much "a stumbling block," as ever he was to the Jews; and to some, in your virtual denial and contempt of him, "Christ crucified" is as much, as ever he was "to the Greeks, foolishness."

You live in this Christian land, and avow your Christian name. You read or hear the evidences of the Christian faith, and express your wonder that the Jew should still deny Christ, and that the heathen idolater should still "fall down to the stock of a tree." Did

not the Jews themselves, in the very moment of their rejecting Christ, stand upon precisely the very same argument, "and say," in the day of Christ's humiliation among them, "If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the Prophets?" And what was the severe reply which the Saviour put for their immediate, their most solemn warning, in his fullest knowledge of their secret enmity to all vital godliness? "Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the Prophets. Fill ye up, then, the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" (St. Matt. xxiii. 30—33.) Can there be stronger manifestation of the extreme danger in which those persons stand who live under spiritual opportunities, and the light of redeeming love shining around them, unaccepted and refused, than language such as this from the very mouth of the meek and lowly Jesus, the tender and compassionating sufferer for the sins of the world? And where is there a distinction betwixt you who, in heart and life, now reject Christ, and those who in his immediate presence declared,

“We will not have this man to rule over us?” You must not speak of Jewish blindness, while you yourself remain wilfully blind; you cannot condemn heathen idolatry, while an idolatrous love of earth and self puts you among those who fight against God, and so causes you to turn your deaf ear against a Heavenly Father’s gracious invitation of—“My son, give me *“thine heart.”* The blindness of the Jew, so visible to yourself, the ignorance and infatuation of the idolatrous heathen, which you so constantly discern, will only aggravate your final ruin, tenfold increased by the light which now shines to guide you, and the knowledge which you really have.

Let this consideration not be lost upon you. “Walk while ye have the light.” Why live the enemy to him, that gracious Saviour, who hath so entirely loved you? Whether Jew or Gentile, bond or free, “the same Lord is rich *“toward all that call upon him.”* Call you, then, upon this merciful Saviour; and he will be a willing, a sufficient Saviour for you. Be alive to your eternal interests in him, and you will be awakened in a most glorious experience in the practical and personal expression of your heartfelt astonishment at the magnitude

of that Saviour's love. In time you will experience his mercy, in eternity you will share his glory; and in time and in eternity your endless song will be amid the thousand times ten thousand that surround his Throne, astonished and glorifying in the greatness and wonder of their salvation: with them will you join in the enraptured utterance of—"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Rom. xi. 33.)

SERMON VII.

"THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES."

DANIEL xii. 4.

Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.

THESE words of the Prophet will naturally lead us to the consideration of the last among the six signs which I have ventured to bring before you as "signs of the times:"—That prodigious increase of knowledge among all ranks of people; a general desire most especially directed towards the study and acquisition of religious knowledge; the press teeming with religious publications; the people eager in the purchase thereof; and the wide circulation of the sacred Word of God over so large a portion of the earth.

In drawing your especial attention to this most manifest and striking feature of our day,

I shall *first* speak of the increase of knowledge so much dwelt upon in Scripture as peculiarly marking the latter days. *Secondly*, I shall advert to the positive fact of its great increase in our own day. And, *thirdly*, I shall point out the different view entertained of this fact, by two very opposite descriptions of professing Christians.

The latter days, that is the Gospel times, are spoken of in the Word of God as a highly privileged period in the history of the world, from true knowledge being its peculiar characteristic. The prophets "who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," do not, indeed, speak of the Gospel times as at once abounding with knowledge of the truth: they manifestly show that it is to be a progressive thing, and only towards the end that it shall be so general as to include the whole world. For though the promise is positive as to the final result, and couched in passages such as these—"The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah xi. 9); and, "after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my

“people. And they shall teach no more every
“man his neighbour, and every man his bro-
“ther, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall
“all know me, from the least of them unto the
“greatest of them, saith the Lord” (Jer. xxxi.
33, 34); though passages of this character
abound in holy Scripture, as speaking of the
fulness of knowledge in the Gospel times, yet
it is evidently of an *increasing* knowledge:
“a little one shall *become* a thousand, and a
“small one a strong nation: I the Lord will
“hasten it in his time.” (Isaiah lx. 22.) “So
“is the kingdom of God, as if a man should
“cast seed into the ground; and should sleep,
“and rise night and day, and the seed should
“spring and grow up, he knoweth not how.
“For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself;
“first the blade, then the ear, after that the
“full corn in the ear.” (St. Matt. iv. 26—28.)
“It is like leaven, which a woman took and
“hid in three measures of meal, till the whole
“was leavened.” (St. Luke xiii. 21.) Passages
such as these, also, prevailing in God’s holy
Word, clearly show that general knowledge
should be arrived at in the history of mankind,
according to that striking illustration of the
same result in each individual believer in the

grace and power of his Redeemer: "The path
" of the just is as the shining light, that shineth
" more and more unto the perfect day."
(Prov. iv. 18.)

The prophecies, considered in this view of their practical tendency, assume their proper character of preparing monitors; and much more awaken us to the useful, or perhaps to any thought at all upon an intended warning, than if it had been spoken plainly and exclusively, that knowledge would at once, and suddenly, and in its fulness and perfection, be sent into the world. We are now prepared to look to any period, and most especially to such a period as is our own day, wherein knowledge generally, and knowledge especially of the best kind, in its very wide and manifest diffusion more and more around us, calls upon us to remember our blessed Lord's own question to all who live in such times as ours—"Can ye
" not discern the signs of the times?"

And this brings me to my second position,—the positive fact of the great increase of knowledge in our own day.

With respect to the fact itself I need not say much: what seems to be matter visible to us all wants no other than the appeal to our

observation and experience for its argument. Science of every kind has been making great advance ; and if, as is probable, there be a rarer portion of deep thought and intellectual research, but confined to some few, as in other times spoken of as times of an enlightened age, yet there is unquestionably a much wider diffusion of learning ; there are more candidates for their measured portion thereof, and more facilities put out for its acquirement, than have ever been known since the world was.

But amid this general and increasing desire after knowledge, it is the seeking after religious knowledge, the pure knowledge of the Gospel, which renders our day so much a day of solemn consideration to us all. So fast has the progress been in the diffusion of religious knowledge here at home, and in other nations abroad, that no one can open his eyes and see, no one can give his ears to hear, but must confess the wide and rapid increase hereof to be the manifest character of our day.

But upon the increase of the knowledge of Christ's Gospel alone it is that there is real cause of congratulation among ourselves, and of thankfulness towards God. Unless that knowledge increase and abound, what will all

other knowledge do for us? We have strong testimony, as in heathen history, so in divine truth, to teach us how totally inefficient all human knowledge is apart from that which is divine. The history of the unenlightened times, unenlightened by divine truth, is little more than an illustration of what God's holy Word has declared upon the nothingness of all human knowledge, when separated from divine knowledge: "I will destroy the wisdom
"of the wise, and will bring to nothing the
"understanding of the prudent. Where is
"the wise? Where is the Scribe? Where is
"the disputer of this world? Hath not God
"made foolish the wisdom of this world? For
"after that in the wisdom of God the world by
"wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the
"foolishness of preaching to save them that
"believe." (1 Cor. i. 19—21.)

See how striking was the illustration of all this in the history of the ages that are past. What was the end of the learning of the Egyptians? They were a people who had made earliest and great progress in mere human science; and what was the result? It remains the sad argument of the weakness of man, and the utter incapability of the utmost stretch of

human science to guard those, who trust to its power, from such absurdity in the great matter of religious belief and practices, as to have caused the Egyptian system of religion to be looked upon as the very height of human folly and superstition. The religion of ancient Egypt is peculiarly spoken of; and the people who were under its evil influence are marked, in the prophecies of God's holy Word, as "a base kingdom." "It shall be the basest of the kingdoms; neither shall it exalt itself any more above the nations" (Ezek. xxix. 14, 15); and "there shall be no more a prince of the land of Egypt." (C. xxx. 13.)

What, too, was the end of the wisdom of the Chaldæans? Did not their own great monarch confess that, at the eventful period of his most wanting it, it could not profit him? "The wise men" of Babylon could not make known unto him the interpretation of his dream; and, with all their boasted wisdom, they remain in the page of history with little other appendage than their insignificant and recorded titles: "the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldæans, and the soothsayers." (Dan. iv. 7.) All their knowledge has perished amid the ruin of other human inventions; and no memorial

remains even to tell distant generations with undoubted truth, Here stood ancient Babylon. On the contrary, how marked is the ruin of this once centre spot of human wisdom in the sure word of divine truth! "And Babylon, "the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the "Chaldees excellency, shall be as when God "overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall "never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt "in from generation to generation: neither "shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither "shall the shepherds make their fold there. "But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; "and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs "shall dance there. And the wild beasts of "the island shall cry in their desolate houses, "and dragons in their pleasant palaces." (Isaiah xiii. 19—22.)

And what did the very height of human wisdom accomplish for the real happiness and durability of the learned people of Greece and Rome? Their whole history is little else than a catalogue of crimes and individual misery, however garnished with names which have magnified them into objects of almost human worship. What of real wisdom they did possess, they

imbibed from countries where the knowledge of originally revealed truth had left some portion of its enlightening ray; but what was peculiarly their own, savoured of the same character which marks every thing merely human. The samples of both are come down to our times; and in the comparing of what some very few of them seemed to know, with what almost every one of them actually believed and practised, we easily discern the melancholy contrast, and now read, in the experience of their total ruin, the unerring lesson of the insufficiency of all human greatness.

And yet, as though this experience were not enough to confirm the position which maintains that science without true religion to furnish its principles, and to give a sacred unction to its whole character, is nothing worth, an attempt must be made in these very times to avow a Seminary of learning where religion shall be ~~THE PROSCRIBED THING~~; and a Christian country, in its very metropolis, shall put forth to the world instruction in every thing but Christianity. It is a master-piece of Satan's art when he can enlist into his service human energy exhibited in the semblance of good, and holding out to mankind acknowledged

advantages, under more than an *implied* enmity to the pure and vital doctrines of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Under such character the true believer may safely anticipate its final overthrow; it cannot have a blessing upon it to bid it God speed; for it stands up in our day an obtruded argument before us gainsaying the Saviour's declaration, that "one thing is needful;" that "one thing," with these "blind leaders of the blind," is that which they formally exclude.

But, God be praised, there are better things than these. Science holding out its invitation to the world under the recommendatory character of no religion taught or professed, may serve as a rallying point for those who are content to have it so; but our day witnesses in the avowed principle, the fervent prayers, the zealous exertions to promote the knowledge of the Gospel, a gracious, and we trust a sure antidote, under the arm of Jehovah, to all the active machinations now plotting against "the kingdom of God and his Christ." Societies of opposite character abound among us, whose very principle consists in furthering the knowledge of unadulterated and vital Christianity at home and abroad: schools and seminaries of

useful and religious learning are sowing the seed of the Word plentifully around us : the higher ranks of society are many of them awakened to deeper and deeper sense of their great responsibility ; and their peasantry are taught, and their households are influenced by family religion, and by example of life, to the remembrance of their special duty : “ Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy ; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate ; laying up in store for themselves,” as the evidence of their faith in a once crucified Saviour, “ a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.” (1 Tim. vi. 17—19.)

Upon this principle knowledge of the Gospel spreads far and wide ; and many teach, and thousands learn, the glorious truths of the Redeemer’s kingdom being indeed “ righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” (Rom. xiv. 17.)

Knowledge thus spoken of as to increase in the latter days, and knowledge so much

abounding, as is manifest to us all, in these days, it remains that I now speak of the third division of the subject matter before us, and point out the different views entertained of this fact by two very opposite descriptions of professing Christians: 1st, by those who hail the increase of all knowledge but religious knowledge; 2dly, by those who rejoice, with feelings of real thankfulness, that all useful knowledge increases, as preparing the way for the wider extension of religious knowledge, the only end for which they would have any knowledge to increase among us.

You, my brethren, who rejoice at and endeavour to aid the growth of any knowledge save religious knowledge; who in that view of increasing light around us, are cold and hostile to whatsoever makes prominent the interests of the soul, and the things of eternity; who have oftentimes professed and always entertain secret enmity to things spiritual, "the things which are Jesus Christ's;" you seem little to consider, that so long as you are lukewarm in the matter of religious knowledge, you are leagued with the powers of darkness in opposition to the kingdom of light and glory. "He that is not with me is against me," is the Saviour's

warning to you, and the unerring adjudication of your case. Religious knowledge you openly oppose, or by the powerful but silent influence of example, virtually condemn. Sometimes you impute evil to it: allege this as the cause of the increase of crime; and say, with the first opposers to Christ, that much learning herein makes men mad. Sometimes you aim the shafts of ridicule at it, and give it names which may disqualify it for the reception of mankind, calling it enthusiasm, the mask of hypocrisy, the new light.

How little read must you be in the ways of God's providence, as well as in the truths of his holy Word, when such feelings, and opinions, and desires, are received and cherished in your heart! Had successful opposition been permitted to the revival of religious knowledge in earlier times, where would have been the boasted attainments in any of the real and useful branches of knowledge which now constitute your supposed chief good, and cause you to appreciate, and in your way to enjoy, the advantages of civilized life? What if Satan and his emissaries had succeeded in opposition to the revival of religious truth amid the various revolutions in Jewish history, which,

when light dawned upon that people worked for good, and when it seemed well nigh extinguished, caused their heaviest ills? What would our own condition now have been, had the errors of Papal superstition, and the tyranny of Papal usurpation, succeeded against the instruments of God in our great and glorious Reformation; or if the later ruin, consequent to professed infidelity and direct opposition to religious truth in a neighbouring nation, had ruined us, in our adoption generally of what many did adopt individually, as the active principle and avowed foundation of their infidel creed? Though you are not prepared to acknowledge it, Scripture now, and your own confession one day or other, freely given as the token of a better view, or extorted from you in the bitterness of final condemnation, will show that you owe your all of real good to the progress of religious truth. This you know not yet; and your very opposition to the truth adds its testimony to this sign of our times, as an instrument in Satan's devices to oppose the real happiness of mankind, in opposing the growth of spiritual knowledge among them.

Be persuaded, my brethren, to take a better and a happier view of things around you.

Remember that this period of increased religious knowledge calls upon you to consider it as a gifted opportunity; and that for the improvement, or neglect whereof, you stand answerable to God at the future Judgment. Will you go on still lending yourselves as instruments of Satan's malice against your own soul, and shall the Gospel of Christ be still "a stumbling block" to you in your wilful ignorance of its gracious message? or shall it be still "foolishness" to you in your determined rejection of the wisdom it would teach you, and the peace and happiness it would impart to you? In this Gospel you profess indeed to believe; but what did our blessed Lord charge upon those in his day, who also took refuge under their outward professions and observances? "Ye have not His Word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, Him ye believe not. Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." (St. John v. 38—40.) May the Spirit of Christ move your hearts to listen to these words of Christ, and better to profit by their merciful warning, than did those outward

observers, but real enemies of the Law and the Prophets, to whom they were, in tender and forbearing pity, addressed.

You, my brethren, who rightly regard the warnings of the times in which we live, for purposes of spiritual good to your souls; who among "the signs of the times" hail the dawn of religious light, now breaking every day more and more over us, as a dispensation of mercy; who strive to "walk in the light while ye have the light;" you know your privileges too well not to value them; you have the witness in your own hearts that you earnestly seek to value them more ardently, and to apply them more effectually. In these days of abounding knowledge, awakened as you are to the thought of your great salvation in Christ Jesus, "the end of the law to every one that believeth," look first to the state of your own soul, and then, in unison with your own growth in grace and knowledge, to the souls of others. Look with the true missionary spirit on the whole world still "lying in wickedness" around you. Promote the growth of the true knowledge of Jesus Christ wherever you can: at home by your example combining its speaking energy with your personal instructions and

superintending care ; abroad by your utmost exertions, as God shall give you means and opportunity ; at home and abroad by your fervent and unceasing prayer, that the Spirit may be poured forth upon the world, and that "all flesh may see the salvation of God."

Watch against a temptation common in this æra of light, and much urged by Satan in his enmity to the cause of Christ, to wax warm in the argument for general conversion abroad, in somewhat forgetfulness of our far nearer obligations at home. Let the scale of the Christian's call be the exact measurement of your own exertions. The first object of our regard, in the matter of the salvation which is in Christ Jesus our Lord, is evidently our own soul ; then the spiritual interests of our families, our servants, our dependents, our immediate neighbours ; then all who know of, and can in any way be brought within the sphere of, our personal character and conduct ; and then—in the true spirit of Christian love, in remembrance of the words of God himself, "Behold, all souls are mine" (Ezek. xviii. 4)—the spiritual wants of all mankind.

To warn you from professing a general feeling towards all, while you forget individual

care of those more immediately under your proper eye and relative regard, look to Scripture, look to fact. Scripture tells you plainly: "If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." (1 Tim. v. 8.) "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." (Gal. vi. 10.) Then look to painful fact around you. You have the dying and the dead in things spiritual every where forced upon your notice: human creatures in all ranks of society living and dying in as much ignorance of the vital doctrines of Christianity as though Christ were not known nor preached among us. And, strange and monstrous as it may seem, and incredible withal, did not daily experience confirm the melancholy truth, you have dying creatures around you who have lived in ignorance of Christ and him crucified, and are closing their eyes in the same carelessness about things spiritual as that in which they have lived, whose friends will not permit them to hear the truth either of their near end, or of their soul's danger, lest, as they argue, it disturb their last hours. When Satan tempts, and man falls

under delusions such as these, are not you, my brethren, who feel the immense value of deathless souls, loudly summoned, for Christ's sake, to preach and live his glorious Gospel with all the energy and opportunity which these days of increasing light and knowledge inspire?

Thus much has it occurred to me to put before you upon this last, and perhaps this most generally acknowledged sign of our times. One more address, should God permit, on the ensuing Lord's Day, shall conclude the subject, as a summary to the whole. In the mean time dwell much in thought and prayer upon this last great and manifest sign—Knowledge of every kind increasing continually around us. This seems to lead us all to two conclusions. One as to the fact: "The people which sat in darkness saw a great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death, light is sprung up." (St. Matt. iv. 16.) The other as to its intended consequences: "God having raised up his son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." (Acts iii. 26.) How we are each receiving such a dispensation is now, upon one moment's reflection, made manifest to our own consciences; and shall one

day be made known before men and angels by the divine knowledge and heart-searching power of that Almighty Lord and Saviour, who, for this very end, hath expressly told us all, that "there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, and hid that shall not be known." (Matt. x. 26.) The most solemn inference that I could deduce, or you receive, upon these our great responsibilities, is seen, and may God's Spirit cause it to be felt, from this unerring truth: "We shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (Rom. xiv. 10), and there give account of how we shall have neglected, or how we shall have profited by, this day of increased knowledge, this æra of Gospel light.

SERMON VIII.

“THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES.”

ST. MATTHEW xvi. 2, 3.

He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, it will be fair weather : for the sky is red. And in the morning, it will be foul weather to-day : for the sky is red, and lowering. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky ; but can ye not discern the signs of the times ?

AS my concluding address to you upon the subject which has latterly occupied some portion of our attention here, I revert to the sacred text under which I first introduced it to your notice. Every portion of the Divine Word is in itself “ holy, and wise, and good,” and should be “ profitable” to us ; but the very words which fell from our blessed and compassionate Saviour’s own lips while, for our sake, he was “ a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief,” seem fraught with peculiar and

most inviting argument: for what he spake he "spake as never man spake;" and what he intended thereby was that, in which we are each most nearly interested, his great purchased gift of our soul's redemption in himself.

For it was simply out of love to immortal souls that he asked of his enemies around him, "Can ye not discern the signs of the times?" And it is still from the same infinite love, that this merciful warning has come down to us in his blessed word; and whether we be his friends, as some are, or his enemies, as many are, in pity and proffered mercy to our immortal souls, he still points to his Cross raised at his first advent, and to his Throne prepared for his second advent, and asks of every one of us, "Can ye not discern the signs of the times?"

In the consideration of this whole subject, I have endeavoured to guard myself from ascribing, and you from expecting that I ascribed, some specific fulfilment of prophetic truth close at hand, because we live amid marked providences of God, such as, in their combined character, the world has never yet witnessed before. And I conclude this subject with the same caution. For though it would indeed be a most awakening and a most glorious theme

in thought, in prayer, in triumphant and sure expectation to dwell upon, that the ages of sin had well nigh filled up the measure of their iniquity, and that millennial glory were at hand; or that in the near approach of the end of all things, sin should be finally arrested, and shut up in eternity with its author, no more to pollute God's "new heaven and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness," for ever; still is it safer, because in itself it is a certain truth, and an evident duty, that we fully believe the *practical intent*, and leave these links in the great chain of fulfilling prophecy to speak their own position in what further they may portend.

But to every true believer, who in the works and ways of providence, as well as in the dispensations of grace, seeks for the will of God, it will not be less an argument for increased watchfulness and prayer because he discerns signs, and confesses that he knows not yet the thing signified, than it ought to be an awful call to the unbeliever, the mere nominal professor of the Gospel, to deepest penitence and thought, in that he cannot interpret the end of what he acknowledges to be an unusual and a marked incident of his day.

To this end, my brethren, I have endeavoured to guide your attention, whether you be found among those who have already received, and daily strive to act upon "the truth as it is in Jesus;" or whether, amid the pursuits and pleasures of this dangerous and deceitful world, you strive to be content with the forms, and as yet know nothing of the power of vital godliness. I do not venture to affirm of these six signs before us that they are signs of something yet to come: I should not presume so to interpret them as to give them a definite character in the great chain of prophetic truth. It is better that we await the ultimate result, if there be any thing specific preparing hereby, and seize the manifest call, as a spiritual lesson for present spiritual profit, that in the awfully displayed wonders of God's power and providence we read what he intends for our own individual watchfulness. But to that extent our mutual duty, mine to suggest and exhort, your's to consider and apply, is quite apparent: for when such a combination of extraordinary incident, affecting whole nations, and giving a new character to much of the complexion of private life, when such events pass before us, we cannot err in looking more closely into ourselves,

and should undoubtedly sin in not regarding them.

To induce you so to look with nearer view into your own hearts, I have put that practical character upon the whole matter, as to show that it was your souls' good, and not mere speculative opinions, which was my great and leading motive. If I, as your Minister, erred not in taking these events in God's rule and providence over us as an imperative duty upon myself so to construe them as a fit subject of ministerial usefulness, it will be further my duty to urge your consideration of the manner and spirit with which the performance of that duty, on my part, has been received by you. To say that I have preached without offence, would be to say what no Minister of Christ, who endeavours to look for the straight forward path of duty in what he does, ought, in the present state of the world, to be prepared to hear. When deathless souls, whether for a Lord's Day weekly address, as in this lowest trust in the vineyard of Christ, or in the far higher and more honourable distinction of a parochial watchman over the sheep of Christ's fold, when deathless souls are in any way committed to our care and interest, there are solemn

truths, warnings, and encouragements from God's Word, which accompany that sacred trust.

Truths such as this: "Woe unto the world "because of offences! for it must needs be that "offences come:" offence against man for the faithful preaching of the Gospel; offence against God for the shameful neglect of the Gospel: "but woe to that man by whom the "offence cometh." (St. Matth. xviii. 7.)

Warnings like these: "Let me not, I pray "you, accept any man's person, neither let me "give flattering titles unto man. For I know "not to give flattering titles; in so doing my "Maker would soon take me away." (Job xxxii. 21, 22.) "If any man preach any other Gospel "unto you, than that ye have received, let him "be accursed. For do I now persuade men or "God? or do I seek to please men? for if I "yet pleased men, I should not be the servant "of Christ." (Gal. i. 9, 10.) *Encouragements* for us thus: "Feed the Church of God, which "he hath purchased with his own blood." (Acts xx. 28.) "Feed the flock of God which "is among you, taking the oversight thereof, "not by constraint but willingly; not for filthy "lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being "lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples

“to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.” (1 Pet. v. 2—4.)

Thus instructed, warned, and encouraged are the Ministers of Christ to shrink from what appears to them a present duty, because some take offence at what they do? “Peace, peace, when there is no peace,” and “prophesying smooth things,” is what the world asks for from our ministry: but if it be not kind, in the care of the corruptible body, to spare the knife from excision of the offending part, how entirely cruel would it be to the eternal interests of the deathless soul to withhold the faithful deliverance of that message which we have ourselves received from God—“The soul that sinneth it shall die!”

It was, then, as matter of fearful warning to the mere nominal professor of Christianity, and as a subject of useful admonition, and consolation, and encouragement, to the true believer in the doctrines of “Christ crucified,” that I have earnestly pressed upon the consideration, and closest personal application, of every one who has heard me, these six signs of our times.

And first, as in the order of their occurrence, I urged you to view that great and fearful

overthrow of long-established order in the kingdom of France, which burst like a storm upon civilized Europe, and brought in solemn and eventful consequences, the effects whereof we experience at this very day. When God thus speaks terribly to the nations of the earth, in permitting the malice of fiends and the corrupt wills of sinful men to interrupt the peace of society, sap the foundation of all moral and religious obligations, and kindle a flame threatening to consume all that is dear and valuable to mankind, it is a warning to the wicked and to the good; and for purposes of mercy or of judgment, each who lives under such convulsions is made amenable for spiritual profits in his Maker's sight.

— I then led your minds to the sad and painful argument of deepest sympathy for others, of holy gratitude and watchfulness for ourselves, in the strange relationship in which this Christian nation stands in its legal ownership over our poor African slaves; human creatures torn originally from their natural rights by people and languages daring to name the name of Christ, and by them subject to the pains, and by them still continued in the bonds, of a degraded slavery; our fellow-creature man, man

in body, man in soul, man in every pain and sympathy of sorrow or of joy for this world, of trial and probation for an eternity of happiness or of woe in the next world ; man in every thing as we ourselves are, save only that the tincture of his skin is black ; this our entire fellow-creature, first stolen, captured, and banished from his home, and then by ourselves, in hereditary and descending legal right of many generations, bought and sold, and worked and flogged in foreign climes, as we buy and sell and work and flog poor dumb beasts at home.

If under this most extraordinary relationship, this monstrous service protected for centuries by our laws, agreed to by our national feelings, and justified by our self-interested argument—"the love of money is the root of all evil" to these poor degraded ones ; if in this strange relationship, the common feelings of humanity are beginning to be awakened, and man now at last meditates common justice to his fellow man, and the pure rule of Christianity is brought as the test and touchstone to this sanguinary error, and as the healing balm of this long-continued and bitter wound ; surely it is an event among the signs of our times calling

upon every one to "remember them that are "in bonds," and so to evidence their faith in Him who has saved both "bond and free" from the slavery and the eternal pains and penalty of sin.

Your attention was then, thirdly, invited to the glorious truth more and more conspicuously beaming forth its cheering rays around us, of the great increase of the knowledge of the pure rule and peculiar doctrines of the Gospel, and a gradual dying away of that listlessness in the spiritual matter of their solemn trust which for so long a period disgraced the Christian Ministry.

Such a sign speaks its own signification, to whatever it may ultimately lead, of present consolation, as well as of present warning; and we all stand before God most awfully answerable for the use or abuse of both, when we manifestly live amid an increasing Gospel light, and with awakened care and watchfulness in the Ministers of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ for the interests of our immortal souls.

You were, fourthly, called upon to view the acknowledged decay of Papal superstition and of Mahommedan imposture, as presenting matter of most important consequence when

finally accomplished in their entire overthrow; and as still holding out their mutual spiritual warning, that in prayer, watchfulness, and closest self-examination, we each put ourselves into the attitude of—"Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

When I named the fifth among "the signs of the times," it was that forlorn case of cast-off Israel, of whom—in their call, their providences, their miraculous theocracy, their first privileges in the offer, their subsequent degradation for the rejection of "that Saviour which is Christ the Lord," their present dispersion, their future restoration—of whom, in all these God's wonderful dealings towards them, his Holy Word is full. We live at a period when their case is brought near, even to our doors; and whatever be the final issue of human means, the very attempt for individual as paving the way for national conversion of cast-off Israel, should not be passed over in this eventful period of the world, as matter for great spiritual watchfulness; for it is an incident which at no time, since Jerusalem perished in her ruins, has ever happened. Time will unfold the purposes of God, so that all may see whether or not "this is the

“Lord’s doing :” be that as it may, for purposes of our individual and spiritual good, we should not be backward in confessing, that it “is marvellous in our eyes.”

You were, lastly, reminded of that prodigious increase of knowledge, and most especially of religious knowledge, which holds up to the believer a sign of great encouragement and praise to God ; and puts both believers and unbelievers, the devoted servants of Christ, as well as the cold nominal professor of his Gospel, into that very condition of high responsibility in matters spiritual, of which our Lord has warned us all : “Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance” (St. Matth. xiii. 12) : “for unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.” (St. Luke xii. 48.)

These six I have thus, in the faithful exercise of my real endeavour to put matter spiritually useful to you and to myself plainly before you, brought for your most serious consideration ; and there, in the full remembrance of the nothingness of all human instrumentality in itself, I would entirely leave it. It is for the spirit of God, not for the exertions of his Minister, to sanctify, to its hallowed end,

the knowledge of "the things which are Jesus Christ's."

But, my brethren, one point, in the final application of this whole matter, I would not withhold: How have you received these things? Has it been with the spirit in which they have been offered, and to the end for which they seem to be fitted? Have they been the means of bringing you to more thought, more feeling for, more attention to the interests of your immortal soul?

Or, have you sat in judgment now, as at other times, upon what your Minister has put before you, rather as matter for which to censure him, than as possible to be blest by God as a remembrance of some awakening, inviting, or cheering truth to yourself? If this latter question be that which applies to any who have heard these things, *they* have heard, and *I* have preached, in vain. To each of you, whether God has blest it to you or not, the whole has been committed as matter deemed calculated to bring each of us closer to Christ, the alone Saviour of our souls, the great Dispenser of all good to man, whether of temporal mercy, providential guidance, prophetic truth, or spiritual sanctification.—The ruin of empires

should remind you of Christ's kingdom which shall never pass away.—Your fellow-creatures in bonds under human slavery should show you the fulness of your personal lesson in the school of Christ, in—"Who maketh thee to differ from another?"—These times of Gospel light should lead you better to seek after and to value your great salvation in Christ; and these times of a real awakening to their spiritual post among the Ministers of Christ should cause you to hearken to the message which Christ commissions them to give, as ambassadors from himself to you.—This evident decrease of influence and power in the two great Antichrists now manifestly waning before our eyes, should create more eager watchfulness for the arrival of that day, whether it be nigh or far off, wherein all "the kingdoms of this world" shall "become the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ."—The case of the Jews, urged more and more upon your notice, should bring you to the remembrance of your privileges in that Christ whom they have rejected, and so to prize the offer of your own salvation in him, as to be enabled to join in the very spirit of the Apostles' prayer—"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is,

"that they might be saved." (Rom. x. 1.) Live the Gospel you profess to believe, and so show to Jew and Gentile your entire belief that "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." (Ver. 4.)—Your dwelling in this day of increasing knowledge should remind you of your talent herein, your present use thereof for Christ's glory, your future account thereof at Christ's judgment.

It is thus, my brethren, that I would have you regard these signs, and every sign in providence and in grace, as intended, in the dispensations of God, to awaken in each of us stronger and closer considerations of our salvation in Christ. To some of you, they are so blest; because you regard every passing event as a merciful opportunity of taking deeper and deeper thought for your glorious Redeemer's kingdom "and the righteousness thereof," which you do seek, as Christ commands you to seek, "first."

To some of you they are not so blest. You regard not these, nor any signs calling upon you, as messengers from God, to take thought for your eternal interests in Christ. You, then, are more fearfully concerned in this whole matter; and to you would I more immediately

address my concluding and most earnest appeal.

In health, in youth, in worldly joys and pleasures, or in worldly cares and anxieties, you regard no sign which God's providence puts before you. *These signs of mercy* are no signs for you. You will not acknowledge them; or you will not apply them. But remember that God has other signs in store; they are not signs of mercy: there are signs of condemnation; a hardened conscience; judicial blindness; death-bed horrors; final impenitence; fixed and unalterable despair, that dismal foretaste of hell upon earth. And these are no inventions of mine. They are the realities of every day's occurrence, amid scenes of the dying and the dead, continually exhibited around you. Should these signs come upon you in an hour when you look not for them, then would you bewail your sad and sinful neglect of happier and better signs. In thought anticipate them now; and then let the signs of God's still forbearing mercy conduct you also to Christ. God's holy Word is still open for you; and there you read "that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins" (Acts xiii. 38); "to them which sat

“in the region and shadow of death, light is sprung up.” (St. Matt. iv. 16.) Is your conscience at times awakened, and are you tempted to feel your sins too great, your transgressions too numerous to be forgiven? Weep before the cross of Christ, and you will find how true it is, that “the bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory.” (St. Matt. xii. 20.) Is your hope faint? It is the Spirit of God who hath declared, of the Lord Jesus Christ, that “he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him.” (Heb. vii. 26.) Are your sins a burthen to you? Cast that burthen upon Christ: “For He hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him,” (2 Cor. v. 21.)—These, my brethren, are, the invitations and encouragements which all point to Christ, and which give to the signs of God’s mercy around you their proper character. May your consideration of them at length be such, that of you also, in the language of Scripture truth, it may speedily be spoken—“You that were some time alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now

“hath He reconciled in the body of his flesh
 “through death, to present you holy, and un-
 “blameable, and unproveable, in his sight.”
 (Coloss. i. 21, 22.) May his grace lead you
 to your personal enjoyment of his own promise:
 “How much more shall the blood of Christ,
 “who through the Eternal Spirit offered him-
 “self without spot to God, purge your con-
 “science from dead works to serve the living
 “God?” (Heb. ix. 14.) Let this be your
 encouragement, this your solemn warning, and
 then shall you know in a blissful experience,
 how good was it here, how eternally glorious
 hereafter, that you at last became, through
 grace, regardful of “the signs of the times.”

FINIS

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